

Speed services

[Business](#)



Company: PerleCustomer: Speed ServicesSubmitted by: MCC

InternationalDate: September 2000Speed Services Plc. is the largest, independently owned same-day courier company in the UK.

Founded in 1979, the company has an annual revenue of £16 million generated by 42 UK offices. Its headquarters in St Ives, Cambridgeshire, house the IT and central administration departments, as well as the national control centre. Speed Services employs 150 full-time staff and 450 freelance couriers, serving 1, 800 corporate customers, including blue chip firms Orange, the mobile phone operator, and Ondigital Plc., the digital television broadcaster.

Technology pioneer

Since its foundation, Speed Services has striven to be a pioneer in its use of technology. Its team of in-house programmers has developed a unique, integrated end-to-end system for the despatch industry.

The system, called Scorpion, is a database that can be accessed in real-time by all the offices, allowing them to share information easily and quickly.

When a booking is entered, Scorpion selects the most appropriate courier according to the job load and the courier's availability. The database automatically allocates the courier's payment, charges the customer's invoice, and simultaneously sends a text message to the courier's mobile phone. The courier confirms collection and delivery via text messages as well, noting who signed for what. The software then faxes the customer with the progress of their booking in real-time.

The whole process is automated for speed and efficiency, increasing the quality of customer service.

A strain on the network

During the late 1990s, Speed Services experienced a period of rapid growth when it secured a number of major customer contracts, the largest being the multi-million deal to deliver replacement mobile phones to Orange customers nationwide. The contract with Orange doubled Speed Services' revenue from £7 million to £14 million in six months. The increased workload placed a massive strain on the network. The network connections then consisted of a variety of different vendors, including Perle's remote terminal adapters, routers from 3Com and Bay Networks, and the Nokia MUX multiplexer for digital data transfer, which did not support remote access.

The company's smaller offices used dial-up modems over PSTN lines, while the larger sites using 64K leased lines from British Telecom's Kilostream using the X. 25 protocol. It quickly became clear that the network infrastructure would need to be upgraded to efficiently support customer growth. The network was struggling to cope with 4, 000 incoming and outgoing bookings a day. Replacing or supplementing it with a manual system – phoning the booking details to the courier – was clearly not an option, given the integrated nature of the whole despatch process and the standards of service expected by the company's customers.

A second issue was that the old network was non-standard and could not support the requirements of the Orange contract. Orange wanted to install its own terminals in Speed Services' offices to keep track of its orders." We

had to make our network compatible with Orange's and that meant moving to TCP/IP," says Paul Veitch, Systems Administrator at Speed Services. " We had been in discussions about simplifying network management using network devices that would be scaleable and deliver a faster and more efficient customer service. It had also become important to us to reduce our expensive call costs incurred by our sites using dial-up modems.

The Orange contract was the catalyst that really kicked us into gear on converting to TCP/IP."

Perle as a solution

Speed Services was so pleased with the performance of its Perle adapters that when it came to buy network devices that supported TCP/IP, the company selected the Perle JetStream 8500 terminal and remote access servers. The Perle JetStream 8500 system provided connections for up to 24 asynchronous serial devices to TCP/IP Ethernet LANs and supports multiple connections at 230Kbps in a desktop or rack mountable format." We knew Perle's equipment, we liked it a lot, and so we had no hesitation in going back to the company," says Veitch. " Perle's products are reliable, the warranties are very good, and the company support has always been very knowledgeable and helpful.

" Speed Services recognised that the JetStream system supported dumb terminals, allowing the company to protect its hardware investment. The company has installed 40 JetStreams nationwide and now runs only two different models of router, making the network much easier to manage. The whole infrastructure supports the company's SCO UNIX operating system

and server IT architecture. Veitch says, “ With the JetStream products we have the added advantage of being able to use ISDN lines and routers, which has generated huge savings on call costs. And we’ve also been able to set up electronic data interchange (EDI) links with various big customers, including Orange, for automated order-taking for bookings. They just send us a file which we convert into bookings.

” Today, Speed Services’ system is fully integrated with Orange’s network with firewalls to ensure secure transactions. Perhaps the most innovative use of the JetStream system has been in integrating Speed Service’s office alarm system directly into the JetStream server. The company can now detect intruders in any of its offices using a Perle program called MTSD, consisting of relay switches, floor pressure pads and infrared motion detectors. Intruders risk triggering off a signal in the St Ives’ control centre, which staff would immediately see and act upon.

Recommendation

Veitch is very impressed with the performance of the JetStream remote access servers.” They are very reliable and easy to configure,” he says.

“ I’ve helped many non-technical people do the settings on a JetStream just by talking them through it over the phone. With the Nokia MUX multiplexer, you basically had to travel to the site to sort things out. The JetStreams have definitely saved us time on support because they enable remote administration.” He adds, “ Speed Services could not run its business today without the JetStream products. All the other courier companies have

software that will do what ours does, but we are the only company that can run it in real-time.

Our offices can share information and make the most efficient use of each courier's time. Also, the Perle products allow us to set up a new site quickly and easily." He concludes, " Our goal was to be more efficient than our competitors and to have information sharing in real-time. The Perle products have made this a reality."