

Intellect Broadband Campaign Case Study 3 – iSTRAT

Case Studies Demonstrating how SMEs in the ICT Sector are using Broadband
Campaign Sponsors: Intel Corporation (UK) Ltd



Website: – <http://www.istrat.co.uk>

Contact: James Smith (james.smith@istrat.co.uk)

Type and size of organisation

SME offering Systems Integration and IT consultancy. 20 members of staff.

Description of Business

ISTRAT was founded in April 2000 by Ex-Big 5 consultants to provide technology and business delivery expertise without Big 5 overheads. We bring the pragmatic creativity of a smaller company and the stability and processes of a larger organisation at an affordable cost. There are currently 20 members of staff, who work either on client site or are geographically distributed throughout the UK.

We work in primarily two industry sectors, utilities and financial services (specifically insurance/re-insurance). In the utilities sector our clients include Powergen and Severn Trent Water. Within the financial services sector our clients include Benfield, NIG and Britannic Assurance. We also have other clients such as OKI Systems (UK), the printer manufacturer.

iSTRAT provides;

- consultancy (often acting as an independent 3rd party to review solutions)
- project management
- delivery (including technology solutions)

We deliver client focussed solutions to companies based on hard earned experience in their sector which realise improvements in business process to give excellent ROI and reduction in costs.

We are looking to bring our experience of working with larger organisations to SME's. We believe that broadband technology allows smaller companies to hold their own in the supply chain with larger companies, explore remote working opportunities and open up new channels to market.

We are a Microsoft Certified Partner, a member of the Sun Developer Connection/iForce program and a Cisco Authorised Reseller.

Remote workers / are all employees office based?

ISTRAT consultants work remotely either on client site or from home. While working on client site, they use the IT infrastructure onsite to access the Internet. When working from home, consultants use broadband connections to access the Internet. A number of members of staff are also frequently 'on the road'. They require access to central infrastructure resources through mobile devices. In both scenarios, iSTRAT requires an IT strategy which securely distributes centralised infrastructure resources such as Exchange groupware (email/calendar) to the Internet so that it can be accessed from a number of platforms.

Type of broadband connection (ADSL/Cable/Leased Line) and length of time connected

Our central infrastructure connection to the Internet is provided by a traditional frame relay (often referred to as leased line) connection from our ISP. This provides an upstream and downstream bandwidth of 1 Megabit per second. We use a frame relay connection here because we require a high upstream bandwidth, which ADSL and cable modems do not provide. We have had this type of connection since we were founded in April 2000.

Consultants working from home use either ADSL connections or cable modem connections from NTL or Telewest, depending upon availability of service. We deployed this technology as soon as it became available.

We currently use the GPRS network provided by Orange and O2 to provide Smartphone / Blackberry access to central email and calendar resources while travelling or on site. In the future, we would look to maximise on the potential of 3G networks to provide higher bandwidth connections to these devices.

Are you using any associated technology?

- Microsoft Sharepoint technology – this provides a web based portal that allows consultants to re-use knowledge and access our intellectual property such as documents and case studies.
- Cisco Systems IPSec VPN technology based on Cisco PIX Firewalls provides the VPN technology that allows remote workers secure access to our corporate file systems e.g. to backup data.
- A Microsoft Exchange 2000 installation provides the latest groupware functionality to Outlook 2000 clients. Integrated email, calendar, notes and tasks functionality are all included. We also use an element of Exchange 2000 known as Outlook Web Access to provide an Internet facing web-based email interface to remote workers.
- O2 Blackberry GPRS devices provide an always-on send and receive of email to a given user. We are currently migrating to Microsoft SPV Smartphones. These devices act as both a mobile phone, and a PDA. They provide an over-the-air (Orange GPRS) synchronisation direct to the central Exchange store without the need for local cable synchronisation wherever the user is. Email and calendar entries are constantly updated and kept in synch.
- Our new rollout of Dell laptops are specified with Wi-Fi integrated devices to allow staff to use public Wi-Fi hotspots at locations such as airports and on trains to access a high speed network that they can use to connect to iSTRAT infrastructure e.g. using the VPN.

Benefits of using Broadband:

We could not run the business in the same way without broadband technologies being available to deliver information to our consultants.

Cost savings:

- call costs - long calls creating expensive phone bills are replaced with a flat rate per month which allows us to budget more accurately. This keeps us more efficient.
- transport costs - with a much reduced need to travel, we do not have to spend as much on petrol costs.
- time = money. The need to travel less means less time spent on the road not working. Staff are less frustrated and tired from travelling, meaning they are happier in their work and more productive.
- Our Sharepoint deployment allows extensive re-use of information. By not continuously re-inventing the wheel, we reduce time wasted on repeated effort, and make ourselves more agile and hence competitive.
- we can grow at a rapid rate, without having to increase our office space. Office space is not an inhibiting factor.

Familiarity with Broadband technology leads to increased sales and turnover:

As the cost savings become clear to more and companies as broadband becomes widespread, iSTRAT is in an ideal position to maximise on our own experience of broadband and related tele-working technologies e.g. security issues, video conferencing for clients. This will mean increased sales and therefore turnover.

Instant Training:

Our partners and training companies provide extensive material available online. With broadband, our consultants have the connection speed they need to be able watch streaming training sessions or presentation material to help them solve problems or learn new techniques in rapid timescales. This gives us increased efficiency and competitive advantage.

Competitive Advantage:

iSTRAT is committed to staying at the leading edge of technology and bringing our expertise in these areas to deliver the same benefits to our clients. This gives us a unique competitive proposition and ensures we maximise technology to support business strategy.

Any thoughts on future use of the technology? What you would like to do if you could?

In the future, it may be necessary for us to open small regional offices for administrative reasons, or simply to provide a physical meeting location when only this form of meeting will suffice. In this scenario, we will look to extend our VPN deployment to allow broadband enabled satellite offices to securely connect to the central infrastructure. This will avoid the need for us to deploy a server infrastructure at each satellite office.

We are looking to extend our Sharepoint deployment to add more functionality to it. For example, by enabling this portal to allow consultants to submit their timesheets and reports directly to the system, we will realise a number of benefits. For example, admin staff will not have to manually check through email or physical timesheet reports – reducing the time they spend on this will mean they can use their time to better effect on other tasks. In addition, project managers are able to tell at a glance the amount of time put in by each consultant, whether they have submitted their reports on time etc.

With a geographically dispersed workforce, only a broadband enabled infrastructure makes this viable.

We are currently examining the possibilities of deploying Exchange Conferencing Server to host Netmeeting and Instant Messaging. Combined with broadband home connections and web cams, this will provide a text or video conference based method by which consultants can collaborate on projects.