



Zen IP VPN Wide Area Network enables National Tyres to Increase Grip on UK Autocare Market

About National Tyres

National Tyres and Autocare is the largest independent fast fit specialist in the UK. National provides service to the UK's largest car fleets as well as over 1 million retail customers each year. They do this via a comprehensive network of over 200 branches throughout the UK.

National's sister company, Viking International are the UK's largest tyre and autocare component wholesalers, operating from 9 strategically located warehouses, providing coverage throughout the UK. Together, National and Viking form an unbeatable combination with unrivalled buying power ensuring the very best quality products are provided at unbeatable prices and with a level of service that is second to none.

Challenge

National's key business divisions are split across two offices with file, application and mail servers located at the Stockport and Glasgow sites. Each National Tyres branch required access to information located at these sites. At each of National's branches EPOS systems facilitated customer invoicing and, using an ISDN based network, sent a daily update to systems located at National Headquarters.

To deliver growth for the company, National Tyres developed and implemented a new business strategy. The strategy required the timely and secure delivery of information across the company and its growing network of branches. National were keen to streamline processes and take advantage of new technologies

including the implementation of new systems such as on-line ordering with suppliers and automatic stock control. As sites were widely dispersed across the UK it was important that company wide communications could be delivered effectively. National wanted to build a new intranet site to provide company information and required a Wide Area Network that could support branches using this service.

"We are a young expanding business and the question was always being asked 'Would the system cope if we grew in size?'"

Frank Burns, IT Director,
National Tyres and Axle Group

Although National's communications infrastructure was adequate it did not offer the security, reliability and performance the growing business demanded. If the

Project Overview
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Requirements Fast, secure and reliable infrastructure to connect over 200 retail operations across the UK. • Network Solution Zen IP VPN provided a future proof network that improved communications and facilitated expansion • Business Value Flexibility, reliability and improved productivity ensured National remained market leaders • Industry Focus UK's largest independent fast fit specialist • Size Annual Sales in excess of £160,000,000



business was to grow and remain competitive it needed to communicate better with branches and provide a future proof network that could cope with organisational growth.

Solution

After a series of meetings with National Tyres, Zen designed a Wide Area Network that would meet their needs and find the right balance between cost, performance and reliability.

We met with a range of Zen technical and business consultants and weighed up our business requirements now and in the future.



A Zen IP VPN was proposed providing National with their own dedicated private network to connect all branches and main offices securely. Zen IP VPN would provide a reliable and secure private network for National to share sensitive company information including EPOS data, e-mail and documents.

Both main offices were connected into the IP VPN using a 2Mbps ZenDirect Access leased line providing a fast and reliable circuit supported by a 100% SLA. A Zen managed Cisco 1841 router enabled 24x7 monitoring and ensured maximum availability of this circuit and the hosted servers that were accessed by the remote branches.

The National Tyres branches connected into the IP VPN using a Zen VPN 8000 ADSL circuit. This provided National with a cost effective way to upgrade the branch network using Zen's award winning broadband services.

National Tyres wanted to improve business processes and provide the branches with the information and applications to deliver the best service possible. To provide these systems National required Internet access into the IP VPN and as this was centralised it could be controlled and secured by a Zen Managed FortiGate firewall.

Two FortiGate F200 firewalls were deployed in a High Availability (HA) cluster providing automatic failover in the event of any hardware failure. The FortiGate firewalls provided corporate grade Unified Threat Management security to all 200+ sites with content filtering applied to control the Web sites accessed by the branches.

The new IP VPN provided National with the network they required to continue with their growth. Each new site opened can be easily connected into the IP VPN within standard provisioning times and they immediately benefit from Unified Threat Management Internet security and any-to-any connectivity with all other National sites. Should National want to implement advanced applications and services such as VoIP, CRM or virtualisation in the future they have the platform to do it.



“The scope is there for us to increase / improve our level of service as and when the business requires it.”

Project Management

A Zen Internet project manager was assigned to the project and given complete responsibility for the smooth implementation of the solution. The project manager liaised with staff internally and at National Tyres to co-ordinate all aspects of the solution and implementation.

It was vital that the network was implemented in an acceptable and timely manner with minimal disruption. Following a consultative process between Zen Internet and National a project plan was created and agreed. The project plan included a gradual roll-out of just 10 sites each week to enable seamless integration with business services and minimal disruption to day-to-day activities.



“The project was delivered on time and within budget. The tender process and initial meetings brought all aspects to the fore and no hidden traumas managed to arise,” said Mr Burns.

“For a project this size it is very important that the two business partners work closely together. From a timing point of view we as a company set very tight deadlines however as it turned out it was usually ourselves holding things up operationally to catch our breath”, he added.

Benefits

Implementing the IP VPN drastically improved the performance and reliability of the network, whilst also delivering significant cost savings:

“When we first implemented the VPN to our initial sites we were amazed how fast communication down to an individual branch had become,” commented Mr Burns. “Our communication to the sites had increased exponentially but it did not stop there. Looking into this further we discovered some sites were communicating six times faster than others. A slight configuration change at our HQ network and all sites were now operating at this optimum level,” he added.

The new IP VPN provides a secure platform for inter-site communications allowing all remote sites to access information that was previously only available to employees at the headquarters.

Mr Burns commented, “Internal communication is vital in any company in maintaining progress towards business objectives and promoting a ‘team’ atmosphere. The company intranet for National has been launched on the back of the IP VPN and is already proving an invaluable tool in all communication back and forth from National’s retail branches to head office.”



National also benefits from a much more streamlined supply chain with the implementation of an online ordering system with their suppliers. This ensures stock levels remain constant without compromising on service or delivery.

Every member of the Zen team we work with has dealt with us as if we are their number one customer!

One controlled point of Internet access into the IP VPN has enabled the roll out of e-mail services to remote workers improving productivity and decision making. SSL VPN connections are created between remote hosts and the Zen Managed firewall to ensure maximum security. As SSL VPNs do not require a client on the user's device, costs and administration are reduced significantly without jeopardising network security.

"Despite the increase in performance and network advancement the network has actually become easier to manage" said Mr Burns. "Support from Zen has been second to none. Every member of the Zen team we work with has dealt with us as if we are their number one customer!"

National were keen to improve their Wide Area Network but were concerned that this would come at an additional cost to their current communications budget. They were pleasantly surprised when it actually came out lower than their current spend on the legacy network.

"In our business it is 'how many tyres do we have to sell to pay for this service?'. Thankfully in this case it was a lot less tyres than before and we were presented with a 'WIN/WIN' scenario" Mr. Burns said. "Right from the first pre sales meeting, it was apparent that we felt we were an important customer for Zen and that all aspects of our tender process were dealt with efficiently" he added.

"Having many suppliers in various different facets of the business, it is critical that we have a strong working business partnership with whoever we are dealing with. That in itself is the most critical and lasting aspect that we have seen throughout the implementation process."