

Glasgow Opportunities – all systems GO with Zen Partner, Assistec

Glasgow Opportunities is an Enterprise Trust, contracted to Scottish Enterprise to provide business support, training, and start-up advice to small businesses in the Dumfries & Galloway, Ayrshire and Dunbartonshire areas. Also known as GO, the not-for-profit organisation is one of the largest and most successful enterprise trusts in Britain. It has been working with SMEs since the mid-eighties and now has ten remote branches, approximately 90 employees, and an annual turnover in excess of £3.5m.

Operating as a multi-site organisation, the sharing of information was becoming increasingly important. However, GO staff found that they were unable to access shared drives, and could only e-mail information to each other. Their inability to share management level reports and information on how the business was running was becoming increasingly difficult.

Donald Amour, Finance and General Manager at GO, explained that in addition, it's existing Internet supplier "was proving to be expensive and unreliable. We had too many outages either through the ISP being down or failures in the infrastructure that was supplied by our IT support company. Our confidence in our existing IT systems was very low, and this was affecting our staff morale."

ZenPartner provides solution

GO enlisted the help of Glasgow-based Assistec, a Zen Internet Silver partner to provide a solution to their problems. Zen Internet, a leading UK ISP, has provided ZenADSL Office 2000 and ZenSDSL 2Mbps connections for all of GO's branches. VPNs (Virtual Private Networks) have been created between the individual sites, and a central exchange server that provides shared data files and e-mail services to all staff within the group.

Said Amour: "Now all our staff are able to share information, and it's stored more securely on the server rather than being saved on an individual's PC. The information is better managed, and more easily shared between branches instead of being located piecemeal all over the organisation."

Reliability and stability

A reliable connection to the Internet was also important in the branches where staff have to access Scottish Enterprise's Web portal sites to complete their work. All GO staff have to enter data straight into a CRM system used by Scottish Enterprise, and therefore needed a stable platform in order to enable this to work. Staff can now easily enter data on customers and the activity carried out for them directly to the CRM system without worrying that the Internet connection will go down at a vital moment.

This, together with the ability to securely store and share data files and e-mails, means that GO is now running more effectively as an organisation, and is able to provide a better management overview of the business. This, in turn, means that staff are able to provide a more efficient service to customers, with all information easily accessible at all times.

As well as implementing the solution from Zen Internet, Assistec now provides GO with all its IT support to individual users, and maintains the architecture of the VPNs. The solution has now been up and running for about a year, and GO expects to work with Assistec in the future to provide input into strategic development of future IT solutions.

Concludes Amour: "We meet regularly with Assistec to foster an understanding and knowledge of what is driving our business. The system provided by Zen Internet is extremely stable - the staff have confidence that they will have access to the Internet each day and that the e-mail system will flow properly. The implementation was problem free and very quick, and Zen's solution to our problems has provided us with a smooth flow of information that is allowing us to manage our business more effectively."