

Networks

More choice can be a powerful enabler

Despite the challenges of today's unsettled economic climate, this is a period of rich opportunity for UK businesses. Cloud-based services are developing rapidly, enabling businesses of every size to capitalise on new technology without the kind of short-term investment and long-term administration costs this used to need. At the same time, there have never been so many options for high-bandwidth networks.

Understanding the options

By understanding the network options businesses are able to pair the right solutions with the right access technology. It's not just about price, but about finding reliable high-bandwidth services, backed up by business-grade service, support and guarantees, that can deliver what the business needs today and scale up for what it might need tomorrow. With so many options available this isn't always easy or straightforward.

For any client and any application, there are two key factors that should guide your choice of network solution: the technologies available at their location, and the real-world bandwidth requirements for what that customer is trying to do. In terms of the first factor, it's getting easier to find an ideal solution. Next Generation Access (NGA) technologies are now within reach of over half of UK businesses, and should reach two thirds by 2015.

Such developments bring the benefits of Ethernet-based services to a wider audience, including guaranteed symmetrical bandwidth and a comprehensive SLA, including 24/7 UK support and restore and on-site response guarantees. With a dedicated circuit and 100% of the line capacity, there's no need to work around contention, and when customers pay for 100Mbps of bandwidth, 100Mbps is exactly what they get. As well as reduced costs, NGA and Ethernet in the First Mile (EFM) services also come with reduced lead times, making it easier and faster for businesses to get new solutions up and running. NGA, EFM and Leased Line services have another advantage: they're well suited to providing multiple services across a single access line. This enables businesses to run Internet connectivity and SIP Trunking services across one EFM access with multiple, SLA guaranteed logical channels – a cost-effective, fully-converged solution.

This growth downwards for Ethernet doesn't mean that Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) and Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) services are out of the picture. For some businesses, these still offer a great low-cost option. Fibre Broadband solutions can offer up to 76Mbps downstream and up to 19Mbps upstream, with up to 1,000GB of monthly usage. And with FTTP services set to eventually offer speeds of up to 330Mbps, this is only the beginning.

Application needs

That covers the location question, but what about the needs of applications? Well, between them, FTTC and FTTP fibre broadband and EFM and NGA Ethernet solutions can cover the full gamut of requirements, with the main factors differentiating between them being the cost, the size of the business and the number of simultaneous services and users wanting access. ADSL services used to struggle with bandwidth-critical applications like IP VPN services or SIP trunking, but FTTC and FTTP give you more bandwidth to play with, and can easily cope with a business's demands. EFM, NGA and Leased Line Ethernet give you even more still, providing businesses with plenty of headroom and space to grow.

Cloud-based services which might have proved risky or unreliable over ADSL become practical over Ethernet and Fibre. That said, there's more to providing the perfect solution than just bundling the right products together. This is a rapidly evolving marketplace, but it's one where choice shouldn't be a challenge, but an enabler.

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