



Explore raises learning centre standards with Zen's IP VPN

About Explore Learning

Explore Learning is a network of centres offering Maths and English tuition for 5 to 14 year olds, established in December 2000.

Project Overview

Business Requirement

- Fast, secure, reliable network infrastructure to connect 32 sites throughout the UK

Solution

- IP VPN provided a future proof network with increased security and flexibility for growth

Business Value

- Improvements in security and network performance led to an increase in reliability and communication across all sites

Industry Focus

- A network of learning centres offering Maths and English tuition for 5 to 14 year old children

Before moving to Zen we tried a number of different providers. We chose Zen as we found that they lived up to their reputation.

Stuart Morgan, IT Director
Explore Learning

That's Zen thinking

The Challenge

Explore had a network in place which was built using DSL Internet connectivity and used IPSec VPNs for secure communications. The Head Office had a 2Mbps SDSL line and each Learning Centre used ADSL broadband connectivity.

To manage security, a firewall was in operation at Head Office with smaller firewalls at each of the Learning Centres providing each site with protection and also managing the IP Sec VPN tunnels for traffic between each site.

Internet access is key to Explore Learning's operations but needs strict controls as the Internet was being accessed by children.

Web Content filtering became difficult to manage and inflexible as blocking new sites or making any policy changes required a reconfiguration to firewalls located at each site. Explore were hosting all key systems at Head Office, in particular their membership server. All Learning Centres require access to this system to operate efficiently, however they were experiencing performance problems. The reliance of all sites on the circuit at Head Office also created a single point of failure.

With new Learning Centres being opened frequently, performance was continually deteriorating. In addition, new firewalls for each remote centre were expensive and brought with them significant installation and management costs.



“We have found our Zen connections to be very reliable and fast and I believe it is this reliability that means that Explore gets fantastic value for money compared to other ISPs.”

The Solution

The key requirements for Explore were a reliable, scalable and secure network. We recommended that Explore Learning upgrade their current IPSec infrastructure to a dedicated IP Virtual Private Network (IP VPN) solution.

Explore connected their Head Office to the IP VPN using a robust 2Mbps leased line providing guaranteed throughput and backed by a Service Level Agreement. Pre-configured Cisco hardware was used to terminate the circuit and included a 4 Hour onsite response in case of hardware faults.

Each Learning Centre connects to the IP VPN using ADSL broadband and Thomson hardware pre-configured by our support teams.

Once each site was connected and able to securely share data in confidence, the next steps was to provide Internet access into the IP VPN.

Breakout to the public Internet was provided from our data centre and secured by a managed FortiGate UTM firewall providing deep content packet inspection and protection against spam, viruses, and network intrusions.

Explore's primary user base is children aged 5 to 14 years old so Web content filtering was paramount. The Content Filtering feature of the Managed Fortigate Firewall was activated and set up in line with Explore's security policies ensuring safe web browsing for the children.

Explore decided to locate their critical membership server upstream within our network to improve availability and also reduce future bandwidth requirements at its Head Office. Key applications could now be accessed from our data centre without traffic travelling into the IP VPN, out to the HQ and then back across the network to the centre.

Explore staff also required access to the network from home and other remote locations. Our Managed Support Team facilitated a secure encrypted connection between the Managed FortiGate and the client over the public Internet by creating and managing SSL VPN connections between the two devices.





The Implementation

A Prince 2 certified Project Manager was assigned to Explore and given full responsibility for the successful deployment of the IP VPN solution.

The Project Manager met with Explore's IT Director, Stuart Morgan, to discuss every aspect of the project, in particular Explore's concerns about migrating from their incumbent network to the IP VPN.

Following a consultative process between Zen and Explore, a project plan was created, agreed, and incorporated any risks or issues that may arise and potentially have an impact on the project.

The Project Manager then set up a virtual team internally and co-ordinated the transition of Explore to the new network with minimal disruption.

It was very important that the network was implemented in an acceptable and timely manner with minimal disruption to other sites.

It was planned to migrate all sites to the IP VPN within one day and Explore staff were given pre-configured equipment and out of hours support to achieve this migration.

“Since moving to the IP VPN solution I have had to deal with support for new user setups etc. and I have found them to be excellent. It's always nice to deal with people who know more about the technology than you do.”

Benefits of IP VPN

IP VPN provides a completely private wide area network for your business, offering prioritisation of key applications and corporate grade Unified Threat Management (UTM) Internet Security for all participating sites.

Key benefits of the solution include:

- Security
- Reliability
- Performance
- Scalability
- Network Convergence
- Controlled Internet Breakout



Case Study

The Benefits

Implementation and timely delivery of the IP VPN solution vastly improved the security and performance of the network. Staff at all Learning Centres now had secure, reliable and fast access to systems and the Internet.

The IP VPN ensures communications between sites is secure and as no expensive hardware was required at each centre it delivered huge cost savings on both management, hardware and software licensing. The upgraded circuits and removal of the IP Sec VPN tunnels also delivered a significant increase in performance at a number of centres.

Explore could now also benefit from corporate grade, secure Internet access for all of their sites.

“We have now moved to Zen’s IP VPN solution and despite having over 30 separate locations... everyone can work as though on a single network. This saves a large amount of time and money and provides us with a fantastic infrastructure on which to provide services to the business.”

They could also make security changes to the centrally-hosted FortiGate UTM firewall that immediately impacted all 32 Learning Centres rather than configure each one separately.

Explore are growing rapidly and aim to open a new Learning Centre each month. The IP VPN is well suited to these ambitious growth plans, and it is now much easier to add new sites as no complex firewalling and VPN tunnelling is required at each new site.

Explore hope to install an IP Telephony system in the future. The IP VPN is well positioned to accommodate this with private site to site communications, and the ability to prioritise delay sensitive VoIP traffic to ensure quality.

Once installed, Explore will be able to make calls between sites reliably and free of charge whilst also taking advantage of reduced rates for external calls.

“Overall I am incredibly pleased with the move to Zen and I feel that as we centralise our environment into Colocation within Zen the benefits of working with Zen will continue.”

Zen Internet

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Zen Internet

Zen Internet, an independent Internet Service Provider (ISP), has been delivering services to business and residential users in the UK since 1995.

Led by founder and Managing Director Richard Tang, Zen's mission is to provide the best ISP service in the UK and is committed to investing in the latest technologies and providing high levels of service, support and reliability.

Zen's Portfolio

Whether you want a fast, reliable Internet connection, want to build an online presence, or need a server to provide hosted applications, we can help. Our portfolio includes:

Connectivity

- Broadband
- VoIP
- Leased Lines & Ethernet
- IP VPN
- Managed Firewalls

Hosting

- Domain Names
- Web Hosting
- Managed Hosting
- Dedicated Servers
- Co-location

Data Backup

