



BT embraces internal IT agility with Citrix



case study

BT is one of the world's leading providers of communications solutions and services, operating in 170 countries. Its principal activities include the provision of networked IT services globally; local, national and international telecommunications services to its customers for use at home, at work and on the move; broadband and Internet products and services; and converged fixed / mobile products and services. BT consists principally of four lines of business: BT Global Services, Openreach, BT Retail and BT Wholesale.

In the year ending 31 March 2008, BT Group's revenue was £20,704 million with profit before taxation and specific items of £2,506 million.

British Telecommunications plc (BT) is a wholly owned subsidiary of BT Group plc and encompasses virtually all businesses and assets of BT Group. BT Group plc is listed on stock exchanges in London and New York.

BT Operate is responsible for deploying and running communications services for customers over BT Group's core network and systems. It implements and operates the software, hardware and networks that drive the services delivered by BT Retail, BT Global Services and BT Wholesale.

The challenge: the beginning of a new era of efficiency

As a large, global provider of telecommunications services to corporations and consumers, BT Group is dedicated to the use of new technology to improve the customer experience and drive down cost. Nowhere is this more important than at BT Operate, where the business is built on the efficient delivery of services.

A desire to outsource business processes while maintaining leadership in the telecommunications space had seen BT's IT infrastructure evolve to meet individual user needs from across the business, rather than via a single strategy.

BT was already using numerous implementations of Citrix XenApp™ to deliver specific applications to the organisation. Due to evolution over a number of years, BT was running 40 separate Citrix server farms, representing almost 500 servers, and had 27 groups supporting the Citrix technology. This approach wasn't ideal and some duplication of the hardware and licensing meant there was room for consolidation in the setup.

The MyBT portal, a secure, internal Web site for full-fledged remote computing used by 70,000 employees and external partners, needed a common Citrix platform to succeed. Without one, there was a fragmented process for users receiving applications via the portal as they were being delivered from multiple farms, creating authentication issues.

Implementing BTAP's strategy of consolidation

As part of its Access Platform strategy (BTAP), in 2004 BT embarked on a project of IT consolidation in conjunction with Platinum Citrix Solution Advisor, Esteem Systems. BT and Esteem chose to standardise all Citrix implementations on Citrix XenApp, Platinum Edition and introduce Citrix Access Gateway™ appliances for secure application delivery.

With an overall goal of providing rich functionality and greater mobility of the work environment to all users, the BTAP project team was specifically focused towards delivering applications to people – not just the machines they work on.

Key benefits

- Delivers anticipated £4.9 million reduction in annual costs
- Improves user experience and productivity thanks to centralised support
- Enhances employee mobility and enables home working
- Supports overall IT consolidation plan

Networking environment

- Citrix XenApp™, Platinum Edition running on 275 HP ProLiant blade servers
- Citrix Access Gateway™
- Microsoft® Windows Server® 2003
- Windows PCs running XP SP2

Applications delivered

- Microsoft® Office, including Visio® and Project
- SMART (in-house, Visual Basic®-based contact center application)
- CLASSIC (customised support application based on Clarify)
- Other in-house applications

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Ben Cummings

End User Technology Department Manager, BTAP Project Team, BT Operate

“We wanted to create an agile working environment, including home-based working, for people at BT and our partners, so rationalising our multiple Citrix implementations was a key step,” said Ben Cummings, end user technology department manager on the BTAP project team.

To date, a third of the Citrix server farms have been consolidated into one farm in the UK. BTAP holds more than 800 applications, including those used globally by BT Retail campaign call centers, as well as BT Global Services ticketing.

While the Citrix XenApp farm delivers applications including Microsoft® Office, Project and Visio®, it also delivers bespoke applications. These include CLASSIC—a customised version of Clarify for IT helpdesk ticketing used by call center representatives—and SMART, BT’s in-house, Visual Basic®-based contact center application used by helpdesk staff.

Citrix Access Gateway works alongside XenApp to ensure all users have simple, secure access to the applications they need. A customised version of an SSL VPN solution hands Citrix sessions off to Access Gateway to ensure watertight security. The BT Access Platform Web interface continues to be a single, seamless point of access to all applications for users, and can be accessed internally and externally via the MyBT portal.

Selecting the right partner

BT had previously selected Citrix Platinum partner, Esteem Systems as their preferred Citrix supplier for software, services and support following a competitive tender process conducted by BT’s central procurement department. This approach helped BT reduce cost and simplify the way it manages and supports the delivery of Citrix technology to users across the world.

Esteem Systems was one of the first UK Citrix Platinum Partners, is a Citrix Authorised Support Centre and has a long established relationship with BT, having provided their first Citrix solution more than ten years ago.

Putting service first, for everyone

The consolidation project delivered improved services, thanks to the shift from disparate support teams to one central point of contact for all users. One service level across all support groups resulted in centralised incident records and a more consistent user experience.

“Consolidation of licenses, equipment and teams was one issue, but ensuring a seamless user experience for employees, and ultimately our customers, was always the endgame,” commented Cummings. “Technology providers must move beyond solutions focused on particular technologies or applications to create an end-to-end view of services.”

The size of the prize: £4.9 million

After completion, the consolidation project is expected to deliver overall savings of £4.9 million annually (based on 2004 figures), due to the reduction in duplicated license fees, less need for hardware and creation of a central support team.

In the second half of the project, application performance monitoring, a capability of XenApp, Platinum Edition powered by Citrix® EdgeSight®, is due to be implemented. The technology will allow BT to measure performance and availability of the virtualised applications from the user’s perspective, and apply that data to create the best experience.

“The benefits go far beyond server consolidation and cost saving,” said Cummings. “There has been an overall improvement in control, in our ability to deliver and support applications far more quickly and easily, and in the agility of the infrastructure in empowering home-based and mobile working.”

