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Improving on-site productivity for United Living

Citrix SD-WAN facilitates real connectivity

Connecting work sites

"These days, everything is online. You can't operate without a reliable network," says Graham Mountain, Infrastructure Manager for United Living. The business is one of the UK's leading providers of refurbished and newly-built living solutions and, with construction sites all over the country, he understands the productivity impact of a lost line.

"As a main contractor in construction and refurbishment projects, United Living is responsible for health & safety, project management, programme scheduling, etc., so our use of IT is high," he explains. "Our larger sites typically have MPLS lines, but we may also install fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC), ADSL and 4G connections. A key issue is that the main suppliers of connections like FTTC and ADSL are not that reliable. We had a lot of downtime." On top of that, he says, "Building sites may accidentally cut through their cables." When connections were lost, Mountain's team had to deliver a 4G router to the site, reconfigure the site network and then reverse the process when the connections were repaired. "Site managers will tell you that being offline costs them tens of thousands of pounds per day."

United Living selected Citrix SD-WAN to provide a reliable, always-on connection for their sites.

"We looked at the marketplace, but two factors set Citrix SD-WAN apart from the others," Mountain explains. "Firstly, it works on a per-packet basis, not on an average or per-session basis like many of the others at the time. That means there is no lag when it swaps between carriers. Secondly, Citrix allowed us to bond connections together regardless of their size or type. A lot of the others required similar line types."

He continues, "Also, the pre-sales service from Citrix was fantastic. The team spent a lot of time with us before we placed an order, explaining how SD-WAN worked, helping us see how it would work in our scenario. Not every company was willing to do that. The investment in time from Citrix was one of the things that won them the order."

united living

Industry
Construction

Location
UK

Citrix products
• Citrix SD-WAN

Key Benefits
• Citrix SD-WAN provides a reliable, resilient network to 83 permanent and temporary office locations, improving productivity for construction and refurbishment sites

Improved productivity, right from day one

With some guidance from Citrix Technical Services, the United Living team managed the entire deployment themselves.

"We've standardised everything into a 10-inch cabinet that contains the Citrix SD-WAN device, a 4G connection for backup, a switch, a unified access point and cables," says Mountain. "Every site has the same network and the same network IDs, so all the laptops and mobile devices can roam seamlessly between sites. Managers can leave head office, arrive at a building site and the laptop is logged in with no trouble at all. No need to find codes or change settings for different sites. It's a hundred times better than before – staff can walk onto a site and get working."

The standard equipment is portable, too. Site offices exist for anywhere between three months and five years. With Citrix SD-WAN, when construction work is finished on one site, the cabinet can be moved to a new one, getting the new site operational more quickly than before.

As Mountain says, "When we move the kit to a new site, it immediately starts up on the 4G connection and we can add any additional lines as they are installed. This allows for a much more rapid site mobilisation and demobilisation."

SD-WAN also improves on-site productivity by enabling United Living to manage different workloads across the available bandwidth.

"We prioritise the Citrix (ICA) layer, the screen and keyboard updates," Mountain explains. "Software updates and workloads that tend to slow the network get a lower priority."

Previously, a site's connections were upgraded or downgraded to match cost to a construction project's changing workload. Today, SD-WAN manages an adequate bandwidth for even peak periods across FTTC, ADSL and 4G and United Living has ceased using expensive MPLS lines.

"Through the life of a building project, through the ramp-up of staff and beyond, this one box sits there and deals with everything, which is stunning from an IT perspective," Overall, Mountain says, "We chose SD-WAN to improve productivity and we've definitely achieved that. Uptime is greatly improved and we have far fewer call-outs to support sites. In fact, sometimes they don't even notice that a line's been cut. Citrix switches them automatically over to 4G and they just keep working, seamlessly. For some sites, we decided simply to add additional 4G connections rather than get a fixed line repaired."

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Benefits for the IT team too

With SD-WAN managing site connections, Mountain and his colleagues have more time to focus on value-add projects.

"We receive fewer support calls and need fewer staff to manage the infrastructure helpdesk," he says. "And, because we now have internet access on all our sites (as we've moved away from MPLS), we've started to break traffic out locally. That means we save bandwidth because we're no longer pushing services like Office 365 through the core network."

Looking ahead, Mountain says they are exploring greater use of public cloud and moving towards a cloud-native approach. It's all part of a technology plan that will include even greater use of advanced technologies like Building Information Modelling (BIM).

"You can't do that without adequate infrastructure," Mountain says. "With solid, secure and reliable connections to every site, Citrix SD-WAN is helping us lay the groundwork for a bigger business transformation."

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