

InPurple Provides a Firm Foundation for Knight Frank



Knight Frank is a worldwide property specialist with a UK presence that extends to 40 regional offices and a suite of hub sites in London's prestigious Mayfair district, which house the company's 1,500 UK-based employees.

In order to keep pace with the fast moving executive property market and to provide a high standard of service, it is essential for all Knight Frank's consultants to have access to bespoke real-time applications. These allow them to retrieve information quickly on residential markets, valuations and real estate management while talking to their clients.

The applications are managed centrally from each of Knight Frank's two data centres and were originally accessed by each regional office via a wide area network (WAN) connection. It was vital that this link provided a quick, reliable and consistent service, otherwise access times would have increased and compromised the customer experience.

Owen Williams, Head of IT at Knight Frank, explains: "At some point, I'm sure nearly everyone has either phoned a company or gone into a shop and heard the rather

apologetically-spoken phrase, 'I'm sorry, but our network's really slow today, I won't keep you a minute'. Well, that's not the kind of experience we want our clients to receive. They are senior professionals and expect an executive-class service from us, not excuses about a poorly performing computer system."

A Switch in Time

In common with most companies over the last couple of years, Knight Frank experienced a rise in data volumes across its network – spurred on by an increasing reliance on bandwidth-hungry applications. Both factors pushed the existing network to its full capacity, and the first signs of a worrying decrease in performance began to show. It was in this context that Knight Frank took the strategic decision to replace its existing WAN with InPurple from SwitchIP – the first secure, affordable alternative to leased line technology – to link all the regional bureaux and to connect each one into the company's data centres.

"We selected InPurple ahead of offerings from other IT and communications service providers as it was able to increase bandwidth availability by a factor of eight – while still costing exactly the same amount as our existing network," comments Owen Williams. "However, that was not the only consideration. InPurple went one step beyond the former propositions as it applied measurable quality of service standards that could ensure predictable access at all times. This was essential if critical applications were to continue to operate in a fast and efficient manner."

A Secure Network and Trustworthy Pedigree

Williams acknowledges that InPurple's unparalleled centralised manageability and security features played an enormous part in the final decision – citing the fact that the solution requires only a single firewall to protect the entire wide area network and a sole PC to administer it. He clarifies: "By using one firewall across the whole network, InPurple reduces the number of access points at which unauthorised access could, potentially, take place – it also means that one person can take control of all security and general administration functions. This has the effect of centralising all procedures and applying them rigorously across the business."

Williams also notes that the long-term and successful relationship enjoyed between Knight Frank and SwitchIP's parent company, Switch Communications, was a deciding factor: "Switch Communications has an established relationship with Knight Frank as it provides the telecommunications hardware – including the Alcatel OmniPCX systems, phones, PBXs, call centre components, switches and routers – to support the company's entire communications infrastructure. The company's reputation for delivering a high level of customer service and industry-leading products stood in good stead when putting forward its subsidiary venture, SwitchIP and its InPurple product as an alternative to our existing network."

He continues: "The level of commitment we experienced with Switch Communications was translated into exactly the same high standard of work we received from SwitchIP's team of engineers and installers. In my experience, it's often the case that some IT service



providers need a great deal of support and time from their clients, which can prove to be a real drain on resources. However, this did not happen with SwitchIP, and the entire installation was completed without requiring our involvement on a day-to-day basis."

Email and Storage over IP

InPurple now provides each regional office with a 2Mb broadband connection, which allows employees to confidently send and receive vital data without worrying about the speed at which it will arrive at its destination. It has also increased the responsiveness of networked applications and enabled Knight Frank to abandon its array of disparate email systems – introducing instead a dedicated centralised email server.

Owen Williams takes up the story: "As a result of installing InPurple, we have commissioned a range of network-based projects that just couldn't be supported in the past. For example, it has enabled us to improve our data storage policies. This is because information from each site can be backed up to our data centres at a much faster rate – ensuring a watertight disaster recovery strategy is in place, should the worst ever happen. Out of all the solutions we looked at, only InPurple was able to provide the upstream and downstream bandwidth required to make this possible."

Towards a Voice over IP Future

Although not exploited currently by Knight Frank, the InPurple network also has the capacity to provide Voice over IP connections – allowing Knight Frank the option of migrating to a Voice over IP environment. Unlike many competing solutions, InPurple uses a single broadband connection to deliver voice and data – as well as real-time video conferencing capabilities – so there would be no need for Knight Frank to invest in a separate network. This would minimise the impact, in terms of disruption to business and financial commitment, should the company decide to switch to VoIP architecture.

Owen Williams concludes: "InPurple has helped us continue to meet our core business aim of providing outstanding real estate and business support services, as well as up-to-date national, regional and local intelligence on commercial and residential property markets. It has also ensured that our experienced and dedicated team of professionals are not let down in front of their clients because of slow functioning network connections – allowing them to provide a high quality customer experience and continuing Knight Frank's reputation as worldwide property professionals."

SwitchIP

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