

LPC Living specialises in the regeneration of brownfield sites and tower blocks; identifying residential development opportunities in under-developed areas that often feature social exclusion. Its ethos is simple: to provide everyone with the opportunity to enjoy all the benefits of home ownership at a realistic and affordable price. Targeting first time buyers, a typical LPC Living development comprises one or more ex-local authority tower blocks (refurbished as modern apartments including penthouse suites) combined with luxury new build town house villas.

Significantly, LPC Living recently signed an agreement with Salford City Council that will result in the regeneration of the whole of the inner city area of Ordsall with 1,000 new family homes, primary school, health and community centre, and infrastructure.

LPC Living's success has not gone unnoticed with a number of companies now attempting to emulate the Company's success in targeting first time buyers. However, unlike its competitors, LPC Living has stuck to its mantra of selling property to owner occupiers rather than investors (the Company aims to sell out a scheme within three months of the launch), success which the Company attributes to its pricing policy that keeps property within the reach of first time buyers.

Marc Humphrey, Group IT Manager, joined the Company early in 2004, since then, the Business has grown significantly with an explosion in staff levels and a commensurate increase in pressure upon infrastructure, which has grown by more than 400%. Marc's most significant project to date was overseeing (from scratch) the complete IT set up at the Company's new prestigious headquarters, Optimum House, based at Salford Quays.

LPC Living's success has meant that the Company has grown beyond all recognition. Today Marc's greatest challenge is managing an IT infrastructure comprising 90 PCs and 7 servers which is further complicated with a requirement for ad hoc remote office facilities that need to be set up at each of the Company's major property developments to service the needs of on-site development, sales and marketing activity.

LPC Living is a Microsoft House with Windows 2003 servers (email, database, file & print) and XP deployed at the desk-top. Active Directory has been implemented to aid easy migration of staff between locations without need for network reconfiguration to assign user privileges.

Marc Humphrey also assumes executive responsibility for website development and support.

"Whilst Active Directory has simplified user migration between sites, a primary challenge with LPC Living's infrastructure", commented Marc, "remains with the provision of temporary IT services – in particular communications facilities – to support remote offices and show homes at development sites. Commercial pressure demands that the time between completion of a development and opening a show room is as short as possible."

Whilst Marc was able to rise to the challenge with the installation of IT systems, he was continually frustrated with communications services. "A broadband connection would typically take between six and eight weeks to deploy, which in an environment targeting commercial success inside seven days, translates into a serious business challenge."

Researching alternative communications suppliers, Marc Humphrey was intrigued by the commercial proposition offered by Manchester Metronet. In particular, the promise of installation within 5 working days and the ability to relocate services between sites for £400.

Having tested the commercial proposition, Marc identified technical attributes of the network that save time when deploying remote infrastructure: notably that Manchester Metronet delivers a VPN inside the 'Metronet' without connecting through the wider internet.

Marc is quick to accentuate the technical advantage of this approach. "Operating across an exclusive Virtual Private Network, I don't have to install firewalls at remote locations and I can utilise central

anti-virus, anti-spam and general security facilities without having to invest time configuring temporary facilities."

Operating in an owner managed Business that demands staff accountability, Marc Humphrey openly admits to not being a risk-taker and, as such, it is worth noting that he had little concern about using wireless technology. "I took time to research state-of-the-art technology and I was satisfied with other user experiences and I could see that the radio communications has progressed significantly over the last ten years." Even so, he was not about to switch between communications technologies without first proving concepts.

Marc initially ran a dual network alongside leased lines to test performance, and quality of service, for a period of two weeks before committing to wireless, which afforded him an opportunity to iron out minor problems associated with the new site-to-site connectivity infrastructure. "In this phase I found it useful not to be dealing with a monolithic communications giant as I had easy access to engineers and, if necessary, the CEO, who impressed by taking a personal interest in the project."

The migration was a success and Users, save for a planned 30 minute outage during the transition have otherwise been unaware of the change.

The primary benefit of rapid deployment of communications to ad hoc temporary sites as part of the core network, without a requirement to install and configure firewalls and security facilities, has been realised.

While finance was not a pre-requisite, significant cost savings have been realised, as Humphrey points out, "The cost of Manchester Metronet connections to service our Head Office and two showrooms is less than that which we were previously paying for a single connection to Optimum House."

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#### THE CHALLENGE

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#### THE SOLUTION

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