



Case Study: **Stroud District Council**



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Organisation Background

Nestled in the heart of the Cotswolds, Stroud District Council provides local government services to 109,000 people. Like other public bodies it is under constant pressure to reduce costs whilst providing value for money in its service delivery.

Information Technology plays an important part in enabling the Council’s 550-strong team to deliver public services. As Nick Watkins, Head of Modernisation and ICT (Information & Communication Technologies) explains, “We set out a vision to improve our information technology services. We took an honest look and thought we could do better.” The ICT department needed to be more efficient, reduce costs and display environmental responsibility. The core challenge was how to improve the efficiency of the ICT department at a lower cost.

Stroud District Council has a strong, technically competent ICT team. The team worked hard to understand the potential benefits of virtual computer technology. Virtual computing is a software technology which enables applications to run on fewer physical computers; saving costs and IT support overheads.

Nick explains, “We examined the market and our options, and chose Commercial IT Services because of their experience and approach to virtual computing.” Commercial IT Services are a division of the business services group – Commercial Limited.

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Virtual Desktop Computing

The Stroud ICT technical team led the virtual computing project and worked with Commercial’s experts to evaluate Citrix virtual desktop technology. The objective was to reduce the desktop computer management burden and improve the end-user service. Nick explains, “We were spending too much time managing computers rather than supporting end-users.” Citrix enables the end-user’s application desktop to run on a central server through a low-cost computer or terminal. Nick explains, “The ICT team evaluated Citrix as an alternative to desktop computers for the whole Authority and Commercial IT Services helped us understand how we could leverage thin client technology to achieve our aim, starting first with remote workers.”

The Council needed to provide a consistent set of IT services regardless of location and at an affordable price. Nick points out, “Before virtual desktop computing, it was too expensive to provide all the ICT services needed by remote workers in a secure manner.”

The virtual desktop project helped Stroud District Council achieve its remote working objectives in a secure and controlled way, as recognised when gaining approval to join the Government Connect Secure Extranet (GCSX). GCSX is the Government’s secure network for sharing data between public bodies.

The Commercial solution includes Citrix Provisioning Server. Provisioning Server provides a means to manage one single Citrix server image, yet deploy it to multiple devices in a scalable and cost effective way.

Nick explains the key benefit; “It is now easy to deploy new software applications for users through a consistent desktop. The Citrix software helps the IT team make changes and deploy software once and have the functionality available immediately to all users.



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Benefits and savings

The business benefits are significant. Nick highlights, "The Council calculates the cost of managing thin client Citrix devices to be approximately 33% of the cost for managing equivalent desktop PCs, whilst the potential electricity saving is approximately £8,000 each year."

As a public body, Stroud District Council takes its environmental responsibility seriously and is focusing on being carbon neutral through its use of ICT by 2012. The virtual computer project, if deployed across the Council, could deliver an estimated saving of £240,000 over four years, and would also reduce the Council's carbon footprint by an estimated 82 tonnes.

The support benefits are clear; "Each helpdesk engineer used to support 150 users. With the Citrix solution they could support between 300 and 400 users," explains Nick.

The Commercial solution gives the Authority far more flexibility when managing how employees work. Nick reports, "The ICT team now provides a consistent set of software services regardless of location. External users can access IT services as if they were in the office which means we can fully support home workers and the need for a flexible workforce."

Why Commercial IT Services?

The success of the project came from the collaborative approach between Stroud District Council and Commercial IT Services. With complex projects such as virtual computing, it is important to find the right supplier. Nick explains, "You rely on your supplier to tell you what you need and how to make the best use of the technology to fit your needs."

Nick points out, "It is unusual to find a supplier like Commercial IT Services. Commercial were different because they were willing to work with us and not just for us." He goes on to explain why this mature approach from a supplier contributed to the project's success, "When embarking on such a far-reaching project with many unknowns, we found Commercial were willing to give-and-take. They would provide extra time and people if we had something to learn which would be mutually helpful."

It wasn't always easy. As Nick recalls, "We did have problems with the Citrix deployment but Commercial were good at managing them. They identified and resolved the problems." Nick summarises, "Citrix is really just an enabling technology – the key is the design. That's where Commercial's strength lies."

"Commercial IT Services are excellent at advising how best to make use of the technology to fit our needs."

What next?

Stroud District Council has exciting plans following the successful implementation of Citrix virtual desktop for remote workers. Nick explains, "We are planning to extend the Citrix virtual desktop across the Authority."

The Stroud District Council project shows how an effective supplier partnership, coupled with the right enabling technology can produce real business value, as well as environmental and social benefits.

Lessons learned

There are lessons for all organisations wanting to benefit from virtual desktop computing.

First, take time to build a clear business case and supporting strategy. Nick points out, "It's important to justify the project financially and be confident you can make a return on the investment".

Second, break down the project into manageable low-risk with high-benefit stages. "To minimise our risk we set up Citrix virtual desktop for remote users first," explains Nick.

Third, decide how you want a supplier to support you. Nick goes on, "Our ICT team are technically strong and, although Commercial could provide full hand-holding, we wanted a supplier who could explain the Citrix choices yet work with us throughout the deployment".

Fourth, make sure you spend time to thoroughly understand and scope the project. Nick explains, "It is important to understand what we are trying to achieve at a technical level. If not you cannot challenge the supplier who is doing the work." He goes on, "Commercial are great at cutting through the nonsense and helping us understand what we need to know."

Fifth, with complex projects like Virtual Desktop, ensure you confirm your ICT strategy and system design. Nick recognised, "Commercial worked with Citrix directly to make sure the solution worked."

And finally, explain your ICT strategy carefully and manage what people expect. Nick explains the difficulty, "We had to move to Citrix faster than some people wanted to achieve the remote work benefits and to comply with GCSX approval."