

Virtech Ltd

A shared Internet workspace for mobile professionals and teleworkers¹

The challenge

Virtech is a software and services company based in Sofia, Bulgaria. Its main activities are developing information systems, multimedia software, designing and maintaining WEB systems, and providing WEB based training. The company's headquarters and four departments are located in different places. Between them they employ a total of about 25 people. Virtech's customers include foreign software and consultancy companies, financial institutions and SMEs.

When considering new methods of working, the company's principal priorities were:

- improving communications between headquarters and the individual departments
- increasing the speed of response to customer demands
- managing the mobility of programmers within teams working on individual projects
- improving contacts with partners in other countries

It also wanted to create a better working environment for team members, which would help them balance work and personal life and explore new business processes.

The technical solution

An 'Intranet' was developed to support the company's employees, including its teleworkers. This was essentially a Virtual Private Network that ensured everybody could use a common set of tools to help them work together. These tools included off-the-shelf products such as Microsoft's Exchange Server, Outlook and NetMeeting, along with e-mail and file transfer facilities and, of course, the specialist tools needed by software development engineers to carry out their work.

The company's hardware (server, workstations, PCs, modems, routers etc) was upgraded to implement the Intranet and work efficiently as part of it.

The results

Virtech was able to simplify its organisational structure to a single central office and two satellite offices with most of the programmers operating as teleworkers. This not only saved the costs of two offices (some EURO 4,000 per month) but also offered the employees the benefits of:

- more flexible hours
- reduced travel costs
- improved work-life balance

Virtech's General Manager, Vesselin Spirodonov, estimates that productivity has increased by 20% since the implementation of the scheme. The overall efficiency of the company has also increased as a result of better communications between the departments and it is now capable of reacting much more quickly to requests from customers –sometimes even in the customer's office. It can also rapidly involve programmers from different regions in a project. The choice can now be made on the basis of the skills that they offer rather than where they actually live or work.

The technical solution provides excellent facilities for:

- exchanging specifications, images and data
- debugging and testing
- quality control
- co-ordinating the work of distributed multi-national teams

Over 70% of the Virtech's employees say they prefer working from home and the proportion is even higher among younger people.

¹ A more detailed case study can be found on the website of the IST project 'PROTELEUSES' (www.cbt.es/proteleuses), which analysed the ambitions of a number of SMEs and implemented flexible working solutions addressing the principal bottlenecks preventing the achievement of those ambitions.



Conclusions

Virtech is an SME in the information and communications technology sector. However, apart from the specific tools needed for software development, the technical solution could be appropriate to any small business, whose product/service is information or advice. It is particularly relevant to a business that frequently has to assemble short-lived teams of experts (perhaps including freelancers) to address an individual client's problem.

The Virtech solution is essentially a best-practice solution, integrating commercially available hardware and software, to provide a distributed working environment for a team of professionals.