

Success story - PWAN



Tolent Construction Ltd



Snapshot

Tolent Construction is a major construction company based in Tyneside since 1983 that has an impressive portfolio of development projects encompassing all types of building and civil engineering work in the public and private sector.

The requirement

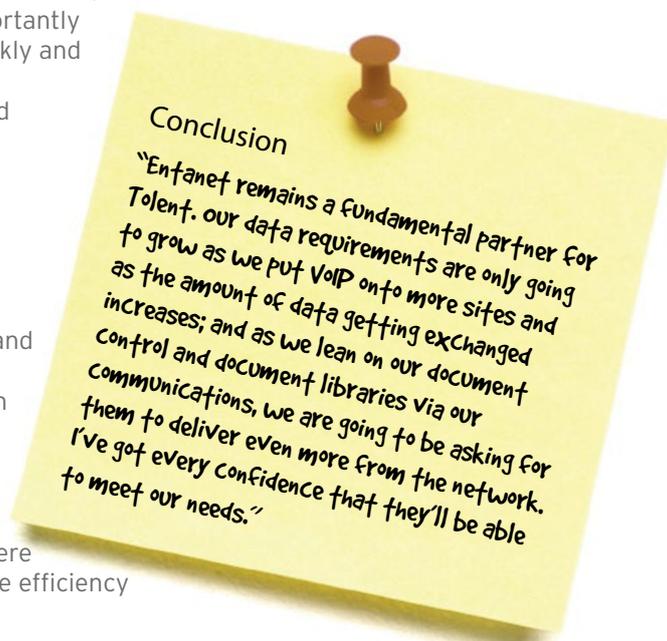
As connectivity becomes increasingly important to the construction industry, Tolent needed a partner that could deliver high quality connectivity to its various construction sites quickly and effectively to support on-site communications, regardless of their geographical locations. Additionally, the company needed to ensure its head office and regional offices were supplied with the fast and efficient connectivity it needs to fully support a 300 strong workforce.

The solution

Since 2007 Tolent has upgraded its head office and regional offices connectivity to utilise a secure PWAN with 100Mbps leased line into the HQ and 10Mbps connections to each of the regional offices. Most importantly for Tolent, each of its construction sites receives connectivity quickly and seamlessly, often using 3G initially until a broadband line can be installed on site. However a variety of technologies have been used successfully.

The benefits

- Tolent has a high quality, fast and secure company network to support communications across its head and regional offices and out to its remote on-site workers
- Tolent has complete peace of mind that each new construction site will have effective connectivity from day one of the building process
- Tolent has complete flexibility, allowing it to use various types of technology and additional suppliers when required
- Cost effectiveness - the network utilises existing hardware where appropriate and has helped Tolent to reduce costs and improve efficiency





Success story - PWAN

In-depth

A relationship you can build on

Tolent Construction relies on Entanet to provide fast, reliable, secure and swiftly-deployable communications services to its multiple sites across the UK – and ensures it can deliver a great service and keep costs under firm control as a result

Tolent Construction has successfully completed an impressive range and huge variety of development projects encompassing all types of building and civil engineering work in the public and private sector. The company was founded in Tyneside in 1983, where it still has its head office. It expanded quickly and today, Tolent is one of the UK's top 100 contractors with over 400 staff and monthly paid employees and regional offices in Teesside, Yorkshire and London.

The company's philosophy is founded on making it easy to do business and advance projects in a professional and friendly manner and to the highest technical standards. It works in partnership with clients, building strong relationships and trust. More than two-thirds of its sales come from repeat business, so customers clearly like its efficient, hands-on approach.

Tolent operates in all market sectors, undertaking the construction of offices and industrial buildings; and residential, leisure and public sector developments. One of its greatest strengths is its versatility and the fact that there is hardly any project that is too small or too big for the company to take-on.

Keeping in touch

Construction is a competitive market and technology has sped up the whole process. Changes to plans and drawings can now be communicated immediately and building firms are expected to be much more flexible and dynamic than they once were.

Today's projects rely heavily on computer systems – not only as the platform for advanced design but also for the ongoing project management and vital calculation and analysis that takes place throughout. As Kevin Latimer, Tolent's Network Manager, explains, one of the most critical elements of any construction project is good data connectivity.

"Nowadays information flow is critical. You really cannot do anything without having access to timely and accurate information. If you are building something you have to make sure you are getting it right. It used to rely on people getting drawings out on desks and checking for revisions and then waiting for them to come through. Today, when revisions are available they expect to have an email notification and to just click through to the document while they are on site."

For a busy construction firm like Tolent this creates two critical requirements: Highly reliable and scalable bandwidth at the centre, so that servers are able to deal with multiple uploads and downloads of very large CAD files concurrently; and flexible, easy-to-deploy connectivity for construction sites. Tolent might have as many as 30 major projects underway at any one time, so it has to know that the connectivity can be provided to multiple sites without delay and that it will be consistent, reliable and cost-effective.

"Tolent operates in all market sectors, undertaking the construction of offices and industrial, distribution buildings, residential, leisure and public sector developments. One of its greatest strengths is its versatility and the fact that there is hardly any project that is too small or too big for the company to take-on."

Kevin Latimer, Network Manager, Tolent Construction Ltd



Success story - PWAN

For the construction sites, rapid deployment capability is vital, says Kevin. "It's not so much the size of the pipe but how quickly we can get that pipe. We can't start work on a site until we get a contract award and when that comes, it might only be a week before we are expected to start on-site. We then have just seven days to get everything in place."

Since 2007, Tolent has relied on Entanet to provide connectivity for its sites. Up until then it had been using a different supplier that purported to have a business focus. However, this more or less only extended to offering a credit account - and Tolent needed more than just back-room functional capabilities.

"At the time, all our supply on site had to be done as cheaply as possible - because IT was not seen as a necessity and we needed to keep the cost down. While I could not fault the connectivity itself, the service and support was lacking. They were still basically a consumer-focused company and the way we had to set up connections was a mess. We had to secure the Internet connections, then create VPNs back to the main office and then go back out again."

Tolent also looked at BT options but these proved highly expensive for the bandwidth that the company needed.

"It's not so much the size of the pipe but how quickly we can get that pipe. We can't start work on a site until we get a contract award and when that comes, it might only be a week before we are expected to start on-site. We then have just seven days to get everything in place."

A fast and flexible solution

Once he started to look into what Tolent really needed, Kevin soon identified a private wide area network (PWAN) as a potentially good solution. He had dealt with Entatech in the past and had heard good things about the connectivity services its former sister company offered. "I already knew that Entanet were quite good and when I looked at the website and read about the secure ADSL PWAN, I thought it was worth investigating."

He got in touch with Entanet to discuss the options and the first impressions were favourable on all counts. After that, things moved quickly. As Entanet has its own network, it could provide secure connections using the existing routers that Tolent had in place and without the need to deploy additional VPN appliances.

The decision to use Entanet's network for new sites was made at that point. The PWAN was set up by Entanet and ADSL connections provided for the regional offices. An SDSL connection was installed at the head office in Tyneside, with an older low-bandwidth BT connection kept on as an overlap to ensure critical financial systems could be supported.

The PWAN however worked faultlessly and Tolent soon switched all its connectivity to Entanet. Today the head office has a 100Mbps leased line and there are 10Mbps connections into each of Tolent's offices in Leeds, Teeside and London.

While the full switch-over of the head office was phased, after the initial engagement in 2007 all new Tolent construction sites were connected straight into the Entanet-delivered PWAN, providing them with immediate access to the regional offices.



Success story - PWAN

At the time many active sites continued to use connections from the previous supplier, with those sites with time left to run later migrated across to the new PWAN. "That was a fairly smooth process because it was really just a standard DSL migration and it was all handled by Entanet", Kevin recalled.

Faster deployment, improved flexibility and lower costs

From the outset, working with Entanet has yielded extremely positive results for Tolent, says Kevin Latimer. "From the very start, the PWAN streamlined the whole process. The sites did not see any increase in costs, as they did not have to buy any new hardware, and we got a level of performance, security and manageability that we couldn't have achieved using a standard connection."

At first, Tolent was putting simple ADSL connections and a functional broadband router into each site, running at whatever speed was available. Today, with the greater awareness of the importance of good connectivity, more bandwidth and better performance is required.

"Everybody completely appreciates their dependence on technology now, so we are putting in Cisco 800 routers and the sites immediately kick-off on 3G. We then order a fixed line from Entanet and once that comes on, an ADSL line. Once that's installed we just switch over, after which we have an automatic failover in place as well; and all that happens seamlessly."

As a result, sites can be up and running the next day while with 3G Entanet provides services almost immediately. "There have been times when we've been notified of a site on the day we are due to start and once I have called Entanet to give them the details; they have set it up and I can then drive to the site, configure the router and that's it, we're ready to go."

Tolent is currently turning over around 12 sites every quarter, so it is keeping Entanet busy. With the strong relationship the two companies have built-up and the excellent support Tolent receives from its connectivity provider, Kevin is always confident that sites will get a fast and reliable connection; and at just about any location in the UK. In most cases it's not an issue but the only question there might ever be is over the 3G coverage Entanet's service provider partner can offer at a site for the initial set-up.

Occasionally, Tolent will get around any 3G issues by asking Entanet to connect another service to the PWAN. For example, on a remote mining site where there was absolutely no 3G coverage, it worked with a company to provide a satellite connection. Tolent will also occasionally ask Entanet to plug in alternative suppliers for particular sites. It's never a problem.

In addition to the speedy set-up, the reliability and built-in failover, the other major benefits of the Entanet PWAN solution for Tolent is reduced overall cost and, even more significantly, flexibility, says Kevin.

"The cost works really well because sites only have to pay for the tail connection. All the rest of it is bundled into our main regional overheads. Also with the 3G, rather than having to pick up individual connections and pay for usage, Entanet actually bundles it all into one, so if we have a very high usage site, that's not attracting very high additional fees and a low-usage site isn't paying for something they are not using.

"Everybody completely appreciates their dependence on technology now, so we are putting in Cisco 800 routers and the sites immediately kick-off on 3G. We then order a fixed line from Entanet and once that comes on, an ADSL line. Once that's installed we just switch over, after which we have an automatic failover in place as well; and all that happens seamlessly."



Success story - PWAN

"Entanet's flexibility is its biggest strength as far as I am concerned. Every time we have mentioned something that we want to do that's a bit strange - and it's usually something they won't necessarily make money out of - they have made it happen. When we want to use connectivity other than fixed line, they will happily help us integrate them. That's great because it gives us additional resiliency outside of Entanet's network and allows us to use 4G, satellite, short-band radio - all sorts of other technologies."

Knowing that Entanet is in full control of its own network and has exceptional levels of technical capability is also important to Tolent. "It all comes into their network and I know that if something goes wrong they will know where it is. I have absolute confidence that they will be able to fix it usually it will be someone I have already met and spoken to that's doing the job."

Being able to get close to the company is important for Tolent, says Kevin. "We want every supplier relationship to be a partnership. We both want something from each other - Entanet wants our business and we want their services. But in order to make that happen we have got to work together."

He can't recall any significant period of downtime and in terms of performance and availability he also says he can't fault Entanet in any way and that having such a dependable and stable supplier makes a massive difference to the business.

"It is essential - that's what maintains your ability to perform. Our site staff have got to have the confidence that when they turn up on that first day they can turn their laptop on and know what they need to know to do today. They may never say it but, yes, they do rely on it and rather than hoping things will work, they will complain if they don't."

Having good connectivity means we can put our key members of staff where they are supposed to be - they are not sitting in an office, relaying information back and forth. It means our senior managers and commercial people can be on-site, actually working on the project they are managing."

Voice is another key service that is being relayed via the PWAN for the construction sites. Having a handset with a single number associated with key individuals is really useful, says Kevin. It is also helping Tolent reduce costs even further, as it's no longer necessary to order voice lines from BT for individual sites.

He describes the level of service, support and account management Entanet provides as 'excellent' and in the future he only sees the relationship getting stronger. "Entanet remains a fundamental partner for Tolent. Our data requirements are only going to grow as we put VoIP onto more sites and as the amount of data getting exchanged increases; and as we lean on our document control and document libraries via our communications, we are going to be asking for them to deliver even more from the network. I've got every confidence that they'll be able to meet our needs."

"Entanet's flexibility is its biggest strength as far as I am concerned. Every time we have mentioned something that we want to do that's a bit strange - and it's usually something they won't necessarily make money out of - they have made it happen."

"It all comes into their network and I know that if something goes wrong they will know where it is. I have absolute confidence that they will be able to fix it usually it will be someone I have already met and spoken to that's doing the job."