In-depth

Building a reputation...

Specialist Apple ISP MacAce.net has been working in partnership with Entanet to deliver high quality broadband services to its customers – with positive results.

Founded in 1996, MacAce is the UK's most well-known and respected Mac ISP. It provides a unique, value-added service for Mac devotees in the business, design and home markets, offering a wide range of data and voice connectivity options including ADSL2+ broadband and secure web and mail hosting backed with first-rate technical help and support for all Macintosh systems.

The company has built up an enviable reputation. In both 2010 and 2011 it was crowned Web Host of the Year in the MacUser awards, having already beaten major consumer broadband providers to be voted by readers as Best Mac-Friendly ISP in the 2009 MacWorld Awards. This was a huge achievement considering MacAce is a relatively small player compared to these industry heavyweights. MacAce was also nominated for three awards in the 2011 ISPAs.

MacAce has achieved this recognition by being focused on the needs of its customers. It sets high standards and as well as the promise of a highly personalised service, guarantees the very best levels of availability. That means it needs to work with communications services providers that it can rely on 100 per cent. MacAce has partnered Entanet for broadband since 2005 and since that time it has built up a large base of customers. More recently it has also started to make use of the managed version of Entanet's Wholesale Carrier Services (EWCS) Broadband to develop its own unique range of products.

High expectations

Gary Hall, CEO of MacAce, wanted to work with a communications supplier partner that would enable his company to offer the high levels of availability, flexibility and technical support that Mac customers expect. Others had proved lacking.

"We were looking for a more flexible platform which gave us more control of our packages and pricing and would allow us to improve management and control of support and problem diagnosis. Because of the types of service we offer, we didn't want to be just another reseller and we explored the option of having our own centrals against using a wholesaler.

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The fact that Entanet was willing to mould its products around what we required, was also a factor. Being Mac-only, our target market is fairly specialised, and we therefore wanted a premium broadband service. Only Entanet could provide our current and future needs at the time."

Entanet went out of its way to make a positive first impression, Hall notes, and has done its best to hold good to it since. "When we first met with them they were extremely helpful and accommodating. Their technical expertise has always been available to us and that has been a massive help in managing the rapid growth in ADSL users that we saw."

The number of enquiries coming into MacAce soon started to ramp up as word about its reliable services began to spread throughout the Mac community. More recently, its ability to offer ADSL2+ has led to a further surge in uptake.

Satisfied customers

Today, MacAce has a significant number of broadband customers, most of whom are more than content, says Hall. "We are Mac-specialists and they simply can't get the same levels of technical support anywhere else. Being able to provide virtually anything our customers require in terms of Internet services ensures that we maximise our customer retention. The vast majority of our customers are perfectly happy with the service we provide them via our partnership with Entanet."

The comprehensive range of products offered by Entanet has helped MacAce to grow and develop its business. "Being able to offer a whole suite of Internet solutions from broadband, bonded broadband, leased lines and so on, all competitively priced and to a high standard, has certainly been very useful to us."

The two companies have developed a strong rapport over the years. "We have a good relationship and my staff and I know many of Entanet's people on a first-name basis. We know who to ask to get something done. Various people at Entanet have particular strengths and they are all willing to help as much as possible, and always happy for you to contact them directly as well. When we initially visited Entanet we were introduced to many of their top people and told to contact them if we needed anything they specialise in. In the first few months we needed to speak to most of them. As you would expect, we deal with their first line technical support daily and they too are proficient and helpful."

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Success story - Wholesale Broadband

Keeping pace

Having built up a good number of customers for standard broadband services and an exemplary reputation, MacAce wanted to ensure it kept up with the pace. It started to make use of Entanet's wholesale managed broadband service to offer ADSL2+ services and this has allowed MacAce to get ahead of the competition, as Hall explains.

"With EWCS we were in a position to announce availability before BT Retail and were working closely with Entanet in the testing phase – right at the forefront of the broadband market."

"We were aware of LLU and cable providers advertising much higher speeds than the standard 8Mbps ADSL Max products and needed to be on board with ADSL2+ at up to 24Mbps as soon as possible. Entanet were first to market with this on 21CN and it proved a success for us in terms of PR for MacAce. We prefer EWCS over LLU because it means the customer stays on the BT network and is not tied to the telco".

With high speed services on offer, MacAce is seen to be at the cutting edge of developments and this has had a positive impact for the company. While the higher speeds will continue to be available only to customers in areas served by 21CN-enabled exchanges, the number of enabled areas is growing steadily. By the end of 2010, over 60% of the UK is expected to be covered. In the meantime, MacAce is seen as being a leading player that can offer a range of services to match any competitor's.

MacAce has adopted the managed version of EWCS in the first instance. This means it can rely on Entanet's technical experts to be hands-on while the early adopter customers come on board. Later, with Entanet's help, MacAce plans to develop its own expertise and capabilities and move up to the unmanaged version of EWCS. As well as giving MacAce the ability to be competitive on price, this will enable MacAce to offer a tailored service, says Hall. "It will lower our costs but the main advantage is being able to provide customised solutions for individual customers – QoS and control over the data will allow us to achieve fairer speeds at peak times and provide custom routes to popular traffic specific to our customer base – including onto our own network."

MacAce has also started working with Entanet to develop VoIP services. "We do get a lot of requests for VoIP but we're really just dipping our toe in the water at the moment. We have found that we can work well with Entanet and that they are happy to listen and work on solutions that fit in with our requirements. That gives us the opportunity to learn about the technology as it grows and experience its pros and cons."

Continued investment

Hall is also encouraged by the way that Entanet's solutions are geared to working with partners and its continued investment in the development of new services, which he feels bodes well for the future.

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"I like the partner-focused products and its solutions are always at the cutting edge. Without Entanet we wouldn't be able to provide such products within our budgets. It allows us to appear to be much larger than we actually are and provide our customers with a complete range of Internet services. Entanet is continually improving its VoIP platform and has invested significantly in its ADSL2+ products. To me it is laying good foundations to what will become leading services."

These elements are really what sets Entanet apart, he believes. "In the market-place today it's Entanet's EWCS products and its focus on the reseller and partner channel. Most other companies have this as an afterthought. Entanet is competitive and very technically competent as well".

Evidence of this is illustrated by Entanet's introduction of fibre broadband products which MacAce is prompting to Cornwall based businesses. As a key Entanet partner, MacAce is actively involved in the Superfast Cornwall, the innovative project aimed at empowering Cornwall businesses and consumers with fibre based connectivity to help increase enterprise and investment in the County.

Hall expects the mutually-beneficial partnership to go on flourishing. As Hall concludes "The partnership will give us and our customers more flexibility and should enable us to offer services that are more tailored to our customers' needs. That in turn, will help us to develop more satisfied customers and keep on building our reputation and our business."

entanet
a CityFibre company

See our product literature for more details about our bespoke services

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