

# Ntouch

Issue 1 : Autumn/Winter 2008

[www.networksfirst.com](http://www.networksfirst.com)



## Challenging times don't always mean bad times

Welcome to the first issue of Ntouch, our new partner newsletter which we are pleased to introduce in response to the independent partner research conducted in May. As a result, Networks First discovered that many of our partners would welcome a newsletter from us as a further channel of communication.

Recent economic events have left many industries struggling to find their way through the doom and gloom of the credit crunch. With the threat of the UK falling into a recession becoming more realistic by the day, it is no wonder the IT industry is holding its breath as businesses continue to cut budgets. However, despite the current economic downturn, the network support services industry finds itself going from strength to strength.

In particular, the demand for high-end professional network support services is booming. In fact, we are delighted to have recently reported a 77% increase in operating profit. This has led to a recruitment drive at Networks First for additional high level expertise. While finding this level of expertise has always been somewhat of a challenge during a busy, buoyant market, we have found the economic slowdown is actually helping us to employ highly skilled people.

We are also investing heavily in training. From a technical aspect, we continue to be fully committed to the very latest training and accreditation programmes from all the leading manufacturers. From a management perspective, we are working closely with the Henley Business School in a leadership programme to ensure our people are able to continue to help us develop the business and move it forward.

Embracing change whilst offering a high quality service at all times will be key to surviving the difficult times ahead. It is partly for this reason that we have created our new internal development team (see below) to help us keep one step ahead in terms of developing or selecting the systems and solutions, which will meet the needs of our services both now and in the future.

Here at Networks First, we are excited about what the next 12 months has in store, and look forward to supporting all our partners meet their business and operational requirements in both the ups and the downs of the market.

*Peter Titmus, MD Networks First*

## News just in...

Networks First is pleased to announce it now has the highest number of Mitel 3300 accredited engineers of any channel only support company.

With eight years average Mitel experience, Networks First's engineering team is currently involved in some exciting and significant UK-wide roll out programmes including the installation and support for a leading private healthcare provider across five sites, an installation project for a District Council on a 200 user system and IP dect surveys and installations for 70 large high street stores. Cenydd Burden, head of client services, Mitel says: "Mitel have a long standing working relationship with Networks First and considers them a first class support services business."

We will continue to build on our in-house IP communication skills through significant investment in training and recruitment. Networks First prides itself on the close link its support team has directly with manufacturers. Steve Niven, Sales Director at Networks First comments: "The Company has built an excellent reputation with many major manufacturers who recognise the quality of support it provides on their products. The manufacturers openly endorse Networks First's services because they recognise our total commitment to delivering a high quality service that can only be achieved through our dedication to training, quality system procedures and professionalism."



## Boosting Partner Support

Networks First continues its dedication to partner support through the recent launch of its new Internal Development Team. Headed up by Clare Newman and supported by Chris Hollis, the team will look to help existing partners develop and expand their businesses by introducing new services and solutions to their client base, whilst supporting them in the associated sales process.

Furthermore, the Internal Development Team are planning a number of key campaigns over the coming months, focusing on specialised manufacturer products or specific business areas. Clare, who joined Networks First earlier this year from Mayflex and may also be known to some of you from her time at Westcon, is planning to expand her team further in the New Year in line with Networks First's continued growth plans.

If you have any further questions, please **contact Clare directly on 0845 260 5455/07980 731486**

# PCI DSS

In 2005 American Express, VISA International, MasterCard Worldwide, Discover Financial Services and JCB International together formed what is now the PCI DSS – the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard.

In 2006 the standard was developed and published and organisations have been formally bound by the requirements since the end of 2007.

Compliance with PCI DSS is not a legal requirement; however Visa, MasterCard and American Express monitor compliance with the standards they have developed. Any organisations that fail to meet the requirements can expect fines of up to \$500,000 per incident involving a loss or compromise of data, as a result of non compliance.

Newly appointed Network Security Consultant Anish Chauhan explains more'

## Why?

There has been a significant rise in credit and debit card fraud. A 20% increase was reported in the year 2006/2007. A total of 2.7 million cases in 2007. In addition, figures show that total losses as a result of card fraud in the UK alone totalled £535.2 million in 2007.

Even from a purely technical perspective, and in the absence of losses and fines, a network that is non PCI compliant is severely falling short of network, and network security, best practice.

## Who Does This Affect?

The requirements for PCI compliance apply to any business that stores, handles, accesses and transfers cardholder data. The standard applies equally to both bricks and mortar merchants as well as those that process card payments online. PCI compliance will be enforced through contractual conditions of trading.

The standard is being updated as feedback on the initial version 1.0, and later version 1.1, is received. For example, one of the notable revisions in version 1.2 is an explicit requirement to strongly encrypt all wireless transmissions of cardholder data across public networks according to industry best practices.

## Assessments

A merchant is classified into one of four levels based on the number of credit/debit card transactions per year. The result of this classification dictates how that organisation must be assessed.

- A level 1 merchant (having more than 6 million transactions per year) must have an Annual Onsite Security Audit (reviewed by a QSA (Qualified Security Assessor) or Internal Audit if signed by officer of merchant company and pre-approved by acquirer) and Quarterly Network Security scan.

- A level 2 merchant (between 1 million and 6 million transactions per year) can complete an Annual Self Assessment Questionnaire and a Quarterly Scan by an ASV (Approved Scanning Vendor).
- Level 3 merchants (20,000 to 1 million transactions) can also complete an Annual Self Assessment Questionnaire and have a Quarterly Scan by an ASV.
- Finally those classified as level 4 merchants (less than 20,000 transactions) must simply complete an annual self assessment questionnaire.

Many of the requirements of the PCI DSS may seem simple and easy to adhere to yet a significant number of companies do not meet the requirements and are shelling out hefty fines in lieu of making their network compliant.

## How Networks First Can Assist Partners in Implementing PCI DSS Compliant Networks

### Networks First is able to assist partners in:

- The redesign of networks to include the implementation of DMZs (1.2, 1.3)\*
- Implementing IP address translation to RFC 1918 standards (1.2, 1.3)\*
- The implementation of encryption across any unsecure network including wireless networks (4.1)\*
- Ensuring wireless networks meet industry best practices (4.1.1)\*
- The implementation of NAC – Network Admission Control (7.1.4, 9.1.2)\*
- Implementing 2-factor authentication (8.2)\*
- The implementation of IDS/IPS systems (11.1, 11.4)\*

\*Section of PCI DSS requirements that this is addressing



## THE 12 PCI DSS REQUIREMENT AREAS

### Build and Maintain a Secure Network:

1. Install and maintain a firewall configuration to protect cardholder data
2. Do not use vendor-supplied defaults for system passwords and other security parameters

### Protect Cardholder Data:

3. Protect stored cardholder data
4. Encrypt transmission of cardholder data across open, public networks

### Maintain a Vulnerability Management Program:

5. Use and regularly update anti-virus software
6. Develop and maintain secure systems and applications

### Implement Strong Access Control Measures:

7. Restrict access to cardholder data by business need-to-know
8. Assign a unique ID to each person with computer access
9. Restrict physical access to cardholder data

### Regularly Monitor and Test Networks:

10. Track and monitor all access to network resources and cardholder data
11. Regularly test security systems and processes

### Maintain an Information Security Policy:

12. Maintain a policy that addresses information security

# New swift service – swift vision providing visibility, control and bandwidth reporting

As IT networks become ever more business critical, avoiding network downtime and optimising the use of a network infrastructure becomes increasingly crucial.

Networks First remote network monitoring service **swift** allows skilled engineers to see network problems and diagnose faults accurately and quickly. Additional services can be bolted on to the **swift** service, or sold independently, a new one being swift vision.

**swift vision's** core objectives are to provide visibility and control of application bandwidth and packet prioritisation across network links. The points of application are:

- Internet Links
- Connections to other organisations/networks eg the NHS N3
- Corporate MPLS links
- Corporate Point to Point links between sites

This service is built on three key technology initiatives – vision, control and reporting.

Vision allows you to understand application traffic, traffic loads, bandwidth utilisation, and ever changing network demands.

The ability to control bandwidth allows you to allocate network resources to support business operations and control non-business traffic. The bandwidth shaping module gives the scout the ability and flexibility to:

1. Reserve bandwidth
2. Limit total bandwidth utilisation
3. Prioritise delay sensitive application packets such as VOIP
4. Contain greedy business applications such as file transfers

5. Allow approved non-business applications to be run without affecting core business activity
6. Block unwanted traffic

By setting one of these policies the flow of traffic can be given the bandwidth it needs to perform, as well as being protected from greedy less important traffic.

At the heart of the service, is the seamlessly integrated **swift vision** scout. Deployed transparently within the LAN, inline before the firewall, the scout has 100% visibility and control over the traffic flow, both to and from the network and internet.

Located in the Networks First NOC (Networks Operations centre) are our dedicated and highly skilled OSG (Out-tasked Services Group) support specialists. The OSG support specialists are responsible for the management, configuration and status of the deployed scout, as well as remotely monitoring the health of the scout, to ensure availability and incident free operation.

Based on customer feedback, the **swift vision** service has initially been designed with the health market in mind. **swift vision** specifically addresses the lack of visibility of the N3 network. We are interested in discussing how this service can be adapted to other vertical sectors and would like to hear your thoughts.

## swift vision opportunities

For you :-

- Increased margin percentage
- Increased customer retention
- Annuity revenue

To discuss **swift vision** in more detail, please contact **David Kirby on 07823 530042**.

## Traffic before swift vision control



## Traffic flow with swift vision control



## Early Findings from Networks First's Cisco Satisfaction Survey Include 100% Customer Loyalty Rate

Networks First has just undertaken its annual Cisco Customer Satisfaction Survey, as part of its annual silver re-certification, and once again appears to be emerging with flying colours.

As part of the process, Networks First customers were given the opportunity to score the company on the quality of its service delivery. Networks First's overall score was an impressive 4.88 out of 5 and the results also revealed a 100% customer loyalty rate.

Steve Niven, Sales Director, Networks First, comments: "We were so pleased with last year's performance that we thought it might be hard to top. It is important to Networks First to deliver a high standard of service and it is great to see the results of the survey are the reflection of customer satisfaction. This accreditation is part of our aim to offer the very best market leading expertise on the technology and products available from all the leading vendors.

"The survey results demonstrate we have a 100% customer loyalty which is not just rare but exceptional," continued Steve. "Although we are not one of Cisco's biggest partners, Networks First has the attributes of a larger partner through our performance and management system development. We believe that it's always possible to go that extra mile for our customers and the results are a true reflection of that."

Networks First's specialist team includes qualified CCIE engineers and account managers who all undergo Cisco training, examinations and hands-on experience before becoming accredited.



## Project Office

Following an internal reorganisation to improve efficiency, Networks First's new Projects Office was created earlier this year with a team fully dedicated to assisting partners with the scheduling of engineering works.

Its team consists of some familiar faces, Karen Pritchard (previously known as Karen Russell), who you may already know through your day-to-day activities with Networks First, and Networks First newcomer Sue Dawson.

The Projects Office's main aim is to formalise all engineering activity throughout the company and provide a focal point for all engineering schedules, which were previously split between our Fareham and Redditch offices.

The department now provides partners with one central point of contact when needing to schedule an engineer, making the turnaround for engineer requests quicker and easier. The project office can be contacted either through your account manager or directly using the following email address: [projectoffice@networksfirst.com](mailto:projectoffice@networksfirst.com)



# People Power

Consequently, customers now regularly need to speak to technically skilled people.

This means engineers now have to have strong interpersonal skills as well as technical knowledge. Once customers asked for the most technically skilled person to deliver their network infrastructures, now they are asking for engineers that they can communicate with, so that they can understand the tasks they are performing and the benefits they will bring.

So is it more important to employ someone with strong technical knowledge or is it better to look for someone who has the customer-facing experience needed to translate the benefits to the business world at large?

Sales teams and engineers should equally understand what the customer is hoping to achieve, interpret the business needs and match the requirement to those needs. It's vital to be proactive rather than reactive. The best engineers are usually also great salesmen because they can engage with customers about real life network situations and problems. They can also spot where a sale can be made. For example, if an engineer knows that equipment is about to become end of life, he can recommend new equipment whilst explaining the benefits of additional features.

People-orientated skills are also vital in gathering feedback, which is crucial to the ongoing success of a service organisation – engineers and post sales personnel are in the best position to get customers to open up and give feedback, good or bad!

At Networks First, we have always prided ourselves on having the best technically trained engineers in the business. However, we now also put as much emphasis on the 'softer' skills including communications and management style. A number of our operational management team are currently undertaking one of the UK's most highly regarded training programmes, created by the Henley Business School, to encourage them to think outside the box and ensure we continue to bring a fresh perspective to every aspect of our business.

Customers need to be able to trust their chosen supplier, from sales through to project implementation and ongoing maintenance. Relationships last a lot longer if managed properly and having employees with the right blend of technical knowledge and interpersonal skills is the fastest way to ensure this.

*Mike Morrison*

**Over the past five years the networking industry has grown and developed beyond many people's recognition. But this transformation has been reliant on the individuals that work in this sector. So how have the people who work in the industry changed and are the skill sets required different now?**

In this day of convergence, quality matters. Trusting a company – and its people – to deliver a high service across a broad range of technologies has never been more important. And as networks have evolved and become more business critical, customers want to understand more about their networks – how they work and their benefits.

## Keeping It REAL

In this era of increasing compliance and escalating cost of business downtime, why are so many companies taking a less than rigorous approach to due diligence?

In an environment where some companies estimate the cost of downtime at \$1 million per hour, and the compliance implications of network failure are potentially devastating, how can companies justify their failure to undertake the simple due diligence required to ensure significant IT investment is appropriately supported and maintained?

It would seem a logical conclusion that organisations need to opt for an IT maintenance provider that can truly support business requirements - from prioritising emergency support for business critical applications to

ensuring rapid access to engineering resources and appropriate spare parts.

Yet many organisations appear to be taking a less than rigorous approach to service provider selection in this area, opting to believe the promises of a growing number of low cost operators without pausing to assess the implications of service failure.

The acronym REAL can be used to remember the four key stages of due diligence:

**R – Research** – Ensuring clear financial accounting practices are being carried out by potential suppliers is an essential step when carrying out supplier evaluations and due diligence.

**E – Engineering resource** - Don't forget to assess the level of qualifications and accreditations a provider has. Many companies make extraordinary claims about their engineering resource when in reality they have a fraction of the numbers.

**A – Accreditation** – Another key criterion is the level of investment a provider puts in spares. Find out about the locations of spares as well as engineers. Only then will it become clear if a two-hour response is really viable. Go and visit spares locations – seeing is believing!

**L – Look into** - undertake regular assessments. Due diligence should not be a one off process. Avoid tie-ins that make breaking a contract expensive. If it's not easy to walk away – don't sign.

## Feedback

We're keen to hear your feedback on our newsletter and would welcome any ideas for content or your thoughts on the layout and style. Please contact the editor at [editor@networksfirst.com](mailto:editor@networksfirst.com)

Networks First  
Number One, Paper Mill Drive,  
Church Hill South, Redditch B98 8QJ  
Tel: 0845 850 5577 Fax: 0845 850 5577  
Email: [editor@networksfirst.com](mailto:editor@networksfirst.com)