

Ntouch

Issue 4 Winter 2009

www.networksfirst.com



New Year, New Director

As 2009 draws to a close and the promise of a new year beckons, I am very pleased to be able to introduce Networks First's new managing director, Sara Gemmell to all of our partners in what is our final issue of Ntouch until 2010.

Sara joins Networks First from Warren Partners, where for the last three years she led the executive search company's technology practice. Prior to this, Sara gained many years of industry experience in companies such as HP and Telenor.

I'm sure that Sara will agree that she is joining Networks First at an extremely exciting stage in its development. As we approach a turnover of £10 million, Sara will be leading the company through the next phase of its growth, helping us to define our future marketing and sales strategy and furthering our aim to deliver increased value to both customers and partners.

As the market finally starts to show the first early shoots of recovery, companies need to be confident that their network infrastructure can respond to future requirements. Networks First is keen to proactively exploit these opportunities with our partners and capitalise on the return to growth by providing a valuable technical service.

Meanwhile, on a more personal note, I am looking forward to spending more time in my new role as chairman exploring how we will continue to develop the business through new ventures, partnerships, acquisitions and the closer alignment and development of associated technologies.

On behalf of Networks First, we would like to wish you all a very happy holiday season and look forward to a prosperous 2010!

Peter Titmus, Chairman, Networks First

Nets

(Network Engineering Tokens)

Do you need more engineering resource, on an ad-hoc basis? Networks First can offer this assistance through **Nets**. Network Engineering Tokens (Nets) (formerly known as Service Credits) can be used to supplement the engineering resource being delivered as part of your support services contract. **Nets** can be used to top up access to engineering resource to assist with network upgrades and ensures your network remains reliable, decreasing the opportunity for downtime.

So why have we renamed service credits to **Nets**? Some of our partners found the term 'service credits' confusing. The word 'credit' meaning a financial payment if not used was understood to be a monetary value refunded to the customer.

Nets can be purchased when placing the contract order or part way through the contract. Please contact your Networks First Account Manager to find out further details about **Nets** and what they can be used for.

Lack of proper due diligence puts UK businesses at risk

At a time when UK businesses are struggling to recover during the economic downturn, many are putting themselves at further risk by not carrying out in-depth checks on their maintenance service providers.

New research carried out by Networks First reveals that the vast majority (87%) of respondents are focused on checking financial stability at the expense of critical factors such as the ability to meet key industry standards, customer references or manufacturer backed technical assistance.

Only 61% considered industry accreditations – both at company and engineer level – either 'important' or 'very important' when performing due diligence. A further 45% also did not place much importance on quality and security standards such as ISO 27001 and ISO 9001 or customer references (38%).

Nearly one in two (47%) respondents placed importance on the ability of a provider to offer a 'one stop shop' of services. However, Peter Titmus, chairman, explains: "Whilst it is important that service providers are able to provide support across a whole spectrum of products and manufacturers, without checking on the qualifications or training of the consultants involved, you could be left high and dry."

The area of due diligence which UK businesses deemed least important was in relation to if the service provider had access to manufacturer technical assistance centres, with only 38% rating this as 'important' or 'very important'. Titmus warns: "Without manufacturer backed technical assistance support, you can't be sure your equipment is fully registered and therefore meeting legal requirements. It also puts you at risk of not getting the appropriate technical updates as they become available or having the necessary support when required."

The survey took place in June 2009 and asked the opinions of 100 senior managers in organisations with over 1,000 employees.

Required: 1 x Wireless LAN

by Paul Lewis, Network Consultant

Networks First has built up a deep understanding of the issues, both business and technical, surrounding wireless networks, over eight years of working in the area. Paul Lewis, one of our experienced Network Consultants, has specialised in wireless throughout this time and has been involved in the design and delivery of many projects which have met or exceeded customer expectations.

All too often I hear the phrase "we need a Wireless LAN"! But I often wonder whether businesses really understand the complexity and the timescales involved in delivering an effective and forward thinking wireless system. The deciding factor in delivering any successful IT offering is whether it meets the customer's needs. When designing any solution, understanding and documenting the business requirements in detail, and as early as possible, is critical.

Whilst it is often difficult with pressurised time-scales, it is critical that solution providers and their partners gain this understanding early on in the sales process. Without this information, both parties run the risk of having either a dissatisfied customer or an unforeseen additional spend on components and engineering time. Networks First has considerable experience working with our partners to navigate through this minefield.

In line with our own experience, best practice dictates the best way of doing this is by asking some key questions and planting seeds of thought in the Network Manager's mind. This will help them to challenge their own business to provide answers to the following areas:

- Who will be using the WLAN, when, where and what for?
- How will the WLAN be managed and secured?
- How does the WLAN need to inter-operate with the wired network?



And for these questions, the answers must consider not just the needs of the business today or next year, but over the entire projected life-span of the WLAN.

Networks First often helps customers to understand issues they haven't even

considered before. For example, what limitations might be imparted on the solution by the capabilities of existing client devices such as bar code scanners? Once the customer details have been properly defined in these areas, each customer proves to always have their own unique set of requirements. However minor these differences might be, they can have a significant impact on the overall solution.

Such a holistic approach generally results in customers widening their horizons on WLAN – either deploying a far more encompassing solution than they ever originally envisaged, or adopting a phased approach, in partnership with their provider, to take future capacity and capabilities into account.

It is the case that for many projects, and for a variety of reasons, it is not always possible to establish a clear, unequivocal specification early in the sales process. Our experience has led to the development of an alternate approach in such cases. In the absence of specific requirements, we have tried and tested caveats which document the features of what may be termed a 'vanilla' WLAN installation, incorporating the services (such as separate access for corporate laptop users and guest users) typically deployed and the associated components required for an encompassing system. This enables our partners to respond in a timely and professional manner, whilst reducing risk.

This practical, real-world approach to the lifecycle of network solutions is reflected in all aspects of Networks First's WLAN service portfolio, any or all components of which partners can use to supplement their own offerings:

- Consultant-led strategic WLAN planning
- High-level WLAN solution design, covering a number of major market players
- Detailed Site Surveying using experienced surveying engineers and industry-recognised AirMagnet surveying software
- Professional Site Survey Report production, incorporating heat maps and detailed recommendations
- Detailed solution design to parameter and value levels, fully notated in a Systems Installation Document (SID)
- WLAN Solution Pre-staging, either at customer site or purpose-built Networks First labs

- Physical AP installation and network / antenna cabling ¹
- Onsite solution integration, including interaction with RADIUS authentication, Certificate Authority and Active Directory ²
- Ongoing component support and maintenance
- Active remote management and/or monitoring as part of our wider remote network monitoring services.

Our portfolio also offers a similarly comprehensive service covering the provision of Wireless LAN based bridging links – a great way for customers to avoid much of the delay and cost of fixed inter-building connections.

¹ Arranged through an experienced 3rd party cabling partner.

² Check with Networks First's Consultant Services team for details of supported systems.

Pricing Analyst appointed, ensuring Intelligent Prices at Networks First

Due to the increase in manufacturers and equipment, Networks First has appointed Edward Bullock as Pricing Analyst. This role will control, monitor and improve the frequency and quality of information delivered to sales which is passed onto partners.

Why has this role been created? Networks First's pricing needs to be continually reviewed so that we can be sure it stays competitive. In addition Networks First will be able to offer an increased database and knowledge of end of life / end of sale equipment that we will be able to pass onto customers during the quotation period.

Our first priority has been to re-categorise all of the products that are in the system. This has simplified the number of categories that we assign to products and made our pricing more transparent.

The next major project is to review our historic maintenance prices and use variance analysis plus other techniques to give a clear picture of our existing pricing; to help provide the necessary "business intelligence" so that we can be more flexible when pricing-up new opportunities.



Networks First announces Service Support Managers

Early in 2009, Networks First announced rapid growth plans. In order for the business to grow, the Directors are focusing their time on strategic development where as the Executive Management Group (EMG) consisting of Sharon Attwood, Jason Peach, Daljit Paul and Sallie-Ann Allen are managing the day-to-day running of the company.

Daljit Paul now has responsibility for service delivery. Due to Daljit's new commitments, and the company's rapid growth, Networks First is introducing two Service Support Managers.

Rod Robertson who has 35 years experience in the Telecoms and IT industry of which the last 12 have been with Networks First, has been appointed as the Service Support Manager for the Southern region. Managing a large team of engineers combined with Rod's enthusiasm and vast technical knowledge has proven his eligibility for such a position.

New to the Service Delivery department and Networks First is Jim McDougall who will be performing the role of Northern Service Support Manager. Jim has 20 years experience in the IT industry, 10 years experience in management, and has worked for various large outsourcers, distributors and system integrators.

The Service Support Managers will engage in a balanced role, with their time spent managing the teams and integrating with manufacturers. Both Rod and Jim's role will encourage the engineers to engage closely with management, enabling their individual ambitions and training requirements to be addressed. Through regular interaction and communication with suppliers and partners, Rod and Jim will ensure that Networks First continue to deliver a high quality service.

Manufacturer Update Brocade

Brocade, an industry leader in data center networking solutions, has announced that effective from 30th September partners are no longer able to purchase PSA (Partner Support Advantage) service. This is part of Brocade's ongoing review of their channel model following the acquisition of Foundry Networks in December 2008. Foundry have built a strong reputation in network switching and routing which Brocade sought to strengthen their market proposition.

Networks First remains a qualified reseller of Brocade IP solutions and is committed to providing first class support for Brocade IP networks. Networks First are working closely with Brocade to help develop a service delivery solution as a replacement to PSA. This solution will provide the same level of TAC (Technical Assistance Centre), software & RMA support wrapped around the same added-value service that Networks First provides to partners and customers.

In the interim, Networks First can still offer TechNet Support Services via Brocade. TechNet is an existing service offering which is available to customers who have purchased Brocade technology. Similar to Cisco's SmartNET it is designed for 1st line end-user support and is available in several levels. Where Networks First can add value and reduce costs by offering a basic TechNet service whilst wrapping accredited engineering skills.

Networks First adopts Green Initiatives

Green initiatives are not only important to Networks First but also our partners and customers. Networks First have participated in a CAESER questionnaire to assess the environmental, social and economic impacts of our business operations. CAESER, a government initiative has already been adopted by many large Government departments and other public sector organisations. Through adopting CAESER, Networks First have demonstrated our commitment to high standards of corporate social responsibility. Following this, energy efficient and carbon reduction initiatives have been introduced to all offices which demonstrate our commitment to a greener future.



To find out further information about CAESER please visit www.caeser.org

How can you reduce your carbon emissions?

- When required replace old light bulbs with energy efficient bulbs. "Office lights left on overnight use enough energy in a year to heat a home for almost 5 months." Reproduced from Employee awareness poster - Lighting PFL306 with kind permission from the Carbon Trust.
- Have smart metering added to your electricity meter to ensure accurate readings are being taken. This allows you to monitor the environmental impact of the company's electricity consumption.
- Recycle paper, plastics and cans.
- Review your heating programmes to ensure they are optimised. "A 2 °C increase in office temperature creates enough CO₂ in a year to fill a hot air balloon." Reproduced from Employee awareness poster - Heating PFL307 with kind permission from the Carbon Trust.
- At the end of each day make sure all PC's, printers and none essential air conditioning is switched off. "A computer left on overnight for a year creates enough CO₂ to fill a double-decker bus." Reproduced from Employee awareness poster - Computer PFL309 with kind permission from the Carbon Trust.

The importance of equipment locations

During an incident the speed and accuracy of resolution is imperative to ensuring the Service Level Agreement's (SLA) customer expectations and ultimately network resolution are met. In order for Networks First to achieve this, accurate site locations and addresses for all equipment is required. Equipment placed on manufacturer enhanced services requires exact site locations. Networks First are currently unable to do this for all equipment. This can result in delays for TAC support if incorrect or insufficient information has been passed to us.

What can you do to help?

During the sales process it is imperative for customers to understand the importance of ensuring the services provider has the correct site locations. A clear explanation to customers that providing Networks First with equipment location addresses enables us to provide the service which has been paid for. By communicating this to customers they will want to provide us with these details. This information is ideally received during the quote stage or latest when Networks First receives the official order. Without these details we are unable to ensure the correct spare and engineering skills are located at the nearest office. If these conditions are not met it can result in a delayed service. For example, spares and engineering resource being transported to the correct area of the country.

Networks First work collaboratively with partners building customer relationships and demonstrating transparency in all areas. We would be grateful if all customer information is passed to Networks First to ensure we are able to deliver the best service available, and not only meet but exceed customer expectations.

Take part in Networks First's conundrum quiz and you may win £50 worth of vouchers

All you need to do is unscramble the following two words

micfdcsnnueo tniioami

Send all responses to editor@networksfirst.com by 5pm, Friday 15th Jan 2010