



## Streamlining access for greater efficiency

Adactus Housing Group plays a significant role in providing and managing affordable housing for tenants across 17 local authority areas in the North West of England. Comprising five independent companies, it owns and manages over 6,000 homes and employs some 400 staff. In addition to head offices in Leigh and Manchester, it operates from three area offices to serve families in need of accommodation and people with complex needs for customised support.

The adoption of Citrix Access Infrastructure and Wyse Thin Computing hardware has enabled Adactus Housing Group to dramatically streamline its information communication operations and enable staff to work more productively and comfortably whilst making significant and long term financial savings.

### Taking Action

Having joined the Group in the mid-1990s, the group IT Manager Yazul Islam has been instrumental in every stage of the adoption of access infrastructure and thin client technology to create a network that is highly efficient and cost effective. As Group IT Manager, he manages a Network Supervisor, an IT Assistant and a Database Administrator. "We're responsible for the Group's information systems" he explains. "This means maintaining and managing our network of servers and desktops so that office, remote and home users have access to our housing management and general applications when they need it."

In the mid 1990's the Group embarked on a plan to move from an old DOS-based housing management system to a Windows based system known as QL that ran on users' PCs alongside standard Microsoft Office applications. However, users found the system to be slow and susceptible to regular failure. At that time, Yazul was going through a process of rebuilding the PCs on a component basis. "To run the QL system we updated them in terms of memory, processor and hard disk to an advised specification" says Yazul. "We later realised this was insufficient." The team identified and installed Windows NT Terminal Server to resolve the problems. "This was a better solution since it allowed us to run the housing management system from the terminal server rather than on individual users' PCs says Yazul. "However, users did find printing to be a laborious process. We tried to overcome this problem with patch-ups, but of course this approach creates the need to maintain the system on a daily basis."

In the late 1990's, the team was introduced to Citrix. "It seemed a lot better and faster than NT Terminal Sever" comments Yazul. "It had already cost us a lot to upgrade our PCs and we could see that to upgrade them again was going to cost in excess of £100,000, before we'd even depreciated the amount already invested." With the help of an independent survey, Yazul

succeeded in winning approval to investigate the Citrix solution.

He then met Citrix Value Added Reseller and IT Consultancy, Novus Group in 2000. "I attended a seminar hosted by Novus at which I heard one of its customers describe the benefits they'd achieved by implementing access infrastructure and thin client technology" he explains. Under Novus' guidance, Yazul conducted a one month trial of Citrix MetaFrame in which access to the QL and Microsoft Office applications was provided to 14 users in one of the area offices. "We saw the benefits immediately and knew it was the right product for us to implement" he adds.

**"We've renewed our entire network infrastructure simply on the savings made by this technology."**

Through the trial, Yazul demonstrated that instead of investing in costly upgrades to the Group's PCs, they should invest in new servers and Citrix. Once approved, and with the assistance of Novus, Yazul migrated the whole organisation to Citrix over a weekend. "Whilst the users had been pleased with the improvements afforded by NT Terminal Server, they could see that the Citrix solution enabled them to access, load and use applications even more quickly." One of the biggest benefits was the team's ability to 'shadow' users. "Shadowing saved us a considerable amount of time, as we were able to guide people as they and we sat at our own desks. That negated us having to visit users at the area offices. Whilst typically it would take us half a day in preparation and travelling time just to solve a problem in 5 minutes, we are now able to help users from head office."

The adoption of Citrix almost halved the day-to-day workload for the IT team. "However, despite running the applications centrally, we still had to visit head office and area office users to deal with general desktop problems such as insufficient memory, Windows not loading properly, broken keyboards and so on" says Yazul. "In the head office alone, we constantly had to solve problems among about 40 people." The problems of ageing PCs not only impacted on the team's time but also raised costs. "Because the technology was changing so fast,

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just changing a noisy or faulty fan often meant changing a motherboard, which then required changing the processor and memory. It was ridiculous. Needing to replace a £5 fan, we would often find ourselves having to replace a complete PC."

## Achieving Objectives

At this time Yazul saw thin client devices in operation. He recognised that with no moving parts they represented the next step in reducing the user desktop problems he was experiencing. Novus undertook a technology review and this helped him confirm the benefits of using thin clients. "The independent consultants had suggested that we replace failing PCs with branded desktops rather than building them ourselves. However, we soon realised that for the price of a single PC we could purchase several thin client devices." Yazul demonstrated that for less than half of the first year salary costs of a new IT staff member he could cover the cost of rolling out thin clients across the organisation.

With the help of Novus, Yazul trialled ten Wyse 3100 series, Windows CE based thin clients in the finance team. One of the most immediate benefits noticed was that they were so much quieter than the former PCs. "The other significant factor was that they were so straightforward to use" he says. "With the thin clients, users can't make mistakes."

Wyse thin clients were adopted across the organisation in early 2003, completely removing the problems with PCs that the IT team had to continuously resolve. "The users noticed the improvement in their working environment, which was quieter, calmer and roomier thanks to the small footprint of the Wyse devices and their lack of moving parts. They also noticed that they were able to start working sooner and more easily. Security was also improved since, unlike PCs, the Wyse thin clients don't remember users' passwords."

With the help of Novus, the team later implemented Active Directory and Exchange 2003. "Expansion of the Group, including the merging of new companies, meant we needed to integrate two different email systems. With Active Directory and Exchange we were able to move all of the users over across a weekend. Nobody noticed the difference when they came in on the Monday morning."

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One of the biggest benefits realised by Adactus Housing Group in its adoption of Citrix and Wyse technology is the impact on its IT budget. Yazul explains: "Every year since implementing the Citrix and Wyse solution our IT capital budget requirement has gone down and down. Compared to other housing groups of our size who typically require a sizeable annual budget, this and last year I didn't need to put a bid in for extra finance." This means that any budget requirement Yazul does have can be spent on even more valuable investments.

Yazul concludes: "We've renewed our entire network infrastructure simply on the savings made by this technology. By implementing Citrix and Wyse thin clients we have saved approximately £150,000 over the past 3-4 years. This has been achieved in no small part by Novus' contribution. When we have a problem, they take ownership of it and resolve it."

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Yazul Islam Group IT Manager



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