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Convergence-ready Extreme Network from Data Integration underpins expansion plans for law firm K&L Gates

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Andrew Collier, Head of Office IS Operations, K&L Gates

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Prior to 2006, K&L Gates had shared its offices at 110 Cannon Street with two other organisations but in the following year, the firm acquired the remaining floors of the building and is now the sole occupier of the site. The additional office space enabled the firm to create stylish, new client meeting rooms and spacious, new hot-desking zones - known as touch down areas. At the same time the firm considered its options for extending its IT resources to service the enlarged office and accommodate the firm's planned future growth.

Andrew Collier, Head of Office IS Operations at K&L Gates explains, "Our old network was based on Nortel Networks' Bay switches which had served our needs for the past ten years, but at the time of our office extension the products had been discontinued. Rather than try to bolt on third party products, we took the opportunity to overhaul the network and bring it up to the latest enterprise class specification that could comfortably support our business objectives."

K&L Gates had a number of key requirements for its new network. With the legal industry becoming increasingly reliant on electronic documents and communications, the network needed to be robust. It needed to support K&L Gates' 300 UK employees, but be capable of scaling when required, to accommodate future growth. The company was also determined to ensure the replacement network could handle IP telephony and video conferencing.

"Our objective was to upgrade to an enterprise grade network that is convergence-ready and capable of handling high-bandwidth applications such as video and voice over IP," says Collier.

K&L Gates has 17 offices in the US, all of which have a data network infrastructure based on Extreme Networks' products. So when it came to replacing the London network, Collier already knew that Extreme products would meet requirements for resiliency and convergence grade availability. With a single operating system and management interface across the Extreme product range, moving the London office to Extreme would have the added bonus that the UK network could be managed from the US and vice versa.

K&L Gates wanted a network with a resilient 10 Gbps core and 10 Gbps uplinks to the edge switches so that it could deploy Gigabit connectivity to the desktop. This high bandwidth configuration would also ensure the network could scale for future needs. Alongside this K&L Gates wanted secure wireless connectivity in specific parts of the building such as meeting rooms and touch down areas.

In January 2006, K&L Gates approached Extreme with their requirements. The solution that Extreme Networks specified comprised two BlackDiamond 8810 chassis based switches to form the core and a mixture of Summit 400 24 and 48 port switches for the edge. The BlackDiamond switches not only offered the firm a highly scalable platform but also a guaranteed 99.999% availability, through a combination of redundant system design, modular

operating system and Extreme's proprietary Ethernet Automatic Protection System (EAPS) offering sub 50 milliseconds failover on network connections. The wireless element included a Summit WM100 wireless switch and four Altitude 350 access points. The whole network would be centrally managed with Extreme's EPICentre management platform so that the US and UK offices could be managed as whole when required.

Having agreed this specification with Extreme Networks, Andrew Collier now needed to find an experienced and reliable integration and support partner to roll out and maintain the network. Andrew chose Extreme Solutions Partner, Data Integration, because the company had an established track record deploying Extreme solutions for other customers and was endorsed by Extreme Networks.

Andrew Collier comments, "A network overhaul is a significant undertaking and there is plenty of opportunity for things to go wrong. But having met with key personnel at Data Integration, I felt comfortable that they had the skills and experience we were looking for and was confident that our project would be in safe hands."

In preparation for the upgrade, Data Integration conducted a series of workshops with Andrew and his team to specify the exact configuration of the network and put together a detailed plan for the roll out. The new network needed to go live that June to coincide with the completion of the building refurbishment and the relocation of staff into their new working environment.

"The upgrade was an important project for the firm and I could not risk it delaying the relocation of staff. Data Integration project managed the roll out from start to finish including bench testing the core network in their lab, configuring all the switches according to the specification we'd agreed, installing the new network in parallel to the old one, testing the new network and then migrating users on to the new network. The project was completed on time and I was pleasantly surprised at how smoothly everything went."

Collier reflects on the benefits of the new network, "Prior to the network upgrade, although we had visibility of the US network, we could not actually manage it and vice versa. Now, with Extreme's EPICentre management platform, we can actively manage the whole network. So if we get into the London office and find there's been a problem with the US network, we can get on and start fixing it before they wake up. We can now monitor the network virtually round the clock."

The old network did not have virtual LAN (VLAN) capabilities, but now with the Extreme network K&L Gates will be able to create separate VLANs for their WLAN and streaming applications, keeping traffic separate and secure. Collier also says that applications like Outlook and file sharing a running noticeably quicker since the migrating across to the new network.

"The Extreme network enables us to run Videoconferencing, streamed corporate communications and training to the desktop. The Quality of Service (QoS) and VLAN functionality of the new network means I can guarantee the performance of these bandwidth-hungry applications without allowing them to affect other activities on the network."

"Our new infrastructure has brought us on a long way. We are a quite a progressive law firm in terms of the way we use technology to increase our efficiency and improve the service we deliver to our clients. Both staff and clients are already enjoying the benefits of wireless connectivity in the meeting rooms and touchdown areas and with the new Extreme network underpinning our IT systems we're confident that we'll be able to cope with any new demands for services and applications from the business."

As the firm grows and takes advantage of new communications and productivity tools, the network has become ever more critical so high-availability is essential. Extreme's EAPS protocol ensures that even in the event of a wire being unplugged or a switch failing traffic is routed round the problem so quickly that a user would see no disruption in their video feed or hear anything different on their IP telephony call. The redundant design of the core network and products within it mean that K&L Gates has hitless failover in hardware as well, while the modular XOS operating system allows the firm's IS team to run software updates without taking the whole network down. The firm also has the peace of mind that Data Integration is on hand 24 hours a day to assist with network issues and can be on site within two hours to replace any failed hardware.

Collier concludes, "The old network was not very resilient, but as the firm grows we simply cannot risk the possibility of network outages. Following the upgrade we now have a very robust and scalable network. Data Integration has been invaluable in helping us to roll it out successfully and on time. They also give us the level of support we need and work flexibly with us to advise how we can get the most out of our new network."

 DATA INTEGRATION
DATA INTEGRATION
18 NORTHFIELDS
LONDON
SW18 1DD

WWW.DATAINTEGRATION.COM