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CABLING APPROACHES TO SURVIVE PANDEMICS WHILE REDUCING OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT!

by
Mike Gilmore, FIA Technical Director
for Networking+ (May 2009)

Travelling through Europe and encountering warnings against swine flu at almost every passport control desk, two fundamental questions come to mind.

The first is simple - why do the Welsh translate “influenza” as “ffliw”? What is wrong with plain old “flu”? The English don’t spell Paris “Paree” just to match the French pronunciation.

Having upset most of the Welsh nation my second question, less controversial but potentially more relevant, is what impact, if any, does an inevitable, truly dangerous pandemic have on the future of cabling infrastructures?

Having discussed the preparations for swine flu with a number of major IT users it has become clear that, with each pandemic scare, more emphasis is being placed on planning for large-scale home-working for their employees. The “avian influenza” crisis of two years ago sparked internal assessments of corporate readiness - with worrying results for many. Even those organisations that had very well developed solutions for disaster recovery (based on the non-availability of service at a specific location) found that they had not effectively considered the impact of widespread non-availability of personnel at multiple locations - worldwide.

Further assessments have been undertaken now that we have a new pandemic threat. It is probably just as well that the threat from swine flu is not proving too serious at this stage since those making those checks have identified that their readiness varies dramatically from one organisation to another and from one country to its neighbour.

Strangely enough, plans for restricting person-to-person contact whilst achieving business continuity are not only a good practice for management of pandemic illness - they are also an excellent way to reduce energy consumption and lower our carbon footprints. Systems being considered to support home-working, and indeed working anywhere other than a dedicated desk in an office, and which have spawned the term “corporate mobility solutions” have direct impact in many other areas - only a few of which are detailed below.

Firstly, we have to consider the impact of mobility on business applications and the hardware used to access them. The applications need to reflect the likely data transfer rate for remote working - so more effort has to be focussed on simplifying the software packages used. The need for data security for mobile users places demands on the equipment they use - removing unnecessary interfaces and input devices thereby cutting energy consumption.

Secondly, we need to consider the real data demands of the networks supporting those PCs. If, for example, we simplify the applications to the point where performance differentials are minimised, independent of location, then the network speeds can be reduced to the lowest common denominator - even in the office. This suggests that greater use can be made of wireless networks in those offices - not just as an overlay but as the primary distribution medium. The concept of “flood” cabling that has become pervasive since the mid-1980s and having been justified by suppliers based on forecasts of ever-increasing data rates to the desk begins to look a little shaky.

Effective corporate mobility strategies, providing viable localised and pandemic disaster recovery solutions, not only support global objectives of energy efficiency but also may significantly reduce both the initial capital investment and operational expenditure required for office infrastructures. However, whilst the complexity and density of direct-connect cabling infrastructures may be reduced, there will continue to be a need to provide lower density connectivity to support wireless networks, building management systems and PoE devices and also to provide designated high bandwidth

connectivity islands. So premises cabling will hardly disappear but it may well change its objectives, its distribution and overall quantity.

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Biography

As the Technical and Standards Director of the UK Fibreoptic Industry Association, Mike is heavily involved in the development of training and competence standards for the fibre installation industry and sets down policy in this area. In addition he chairs the audit and arbitration committees for the FIA. His book "Fibre optic cabling; theory design and installation practice" published in 1991 remains a reference for both experts and entrants into this field.

Mike also initiated the establishment of the Telecommunications Infrastructure Advisory Board (TIA-B) along with the relevant directors of its other host organisations CMA and ECA-ITEC.

In the UK, Mike is Chairman of TCT/7, the BSI Technical Committee responsible for the three panels on telecommunication cabling. He also chairs two of these panels (TCT7/-/1 and TCT7/-/3) and is Secretary of TCT7/-/2. TCT7/-/1 and TCT7/-/2 act to assist development of European and international standards for the design and installation of telecommunications cabling respectively. TCT7/-/2 also manages the implementation of these standards in the UK, where necessary producing supporting national standards.

Mike is involved in CENELEC TC215 - as Convenor of Working Group 1 and Secretary of Working Group 2. These committees are responsible for the development of an integrated series of standards for the design and installation of telecommunications cabling in a range of premises. In 2008 he led the ETSI STF362 on energy efficiency in broadband deployment resulting in the ETSI TS 105174 series documents, allowing Mike to assist in a new TC215 activity covering data centre facilities and infrastructures (monitored in the UK by BSI TCT7/-/3).

At international level, Mike is Convenor of the Cabling Implementation Task Group (CITG) within ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3. This group is responsible for the strategic management of the international standards covering the specification, QA, installation, administration, operation, maintenance and repair of generic cabling. This work supports all the cabling design standards produced by ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3 including ISO/IEC 11801, ISO/IEC 15018, ISO/IEC 24764 and ISO/IEC 24702 for industrial premises produced by ISO/IEC JTC1 SC25 WG3 IPTG (also convened by Mike Gilmore).

Mike is a regular speaker at seminars and conferences in all five continents. He has provided the keynote address and opening presentation in many conferences in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. His seminars, providing regular updates on the progression of cabling standards are particularly well attended and are operating in the UK and continental Europe.