



Willmott Dixon

Having suffered two virus attacks in rapid succession, Willmott Dixon IT staff decided it was time to take increased action against this escalating threat. The solution they chose was MessageLabs's fully-managed anti-virus service, which takes out email borne viruses at the Internet level — because they saw the only way to be truly virus-free was by stopping infections before they could come near their network boundaries. Since making that decision, the concerns related to virus attacks have receded into memory.

Willmott Dixon is one of the UK's leading construction and related services businesses, still privately-owned after five generations. The company was founded in 1852 and today employs more than 1,600 people working through four operational divisions and 25 offices, spread from Newcastle to Southampton and from Cardiff to Norwich.

The company's construction division concentrates on major construction projects in both the public and private sectors. Present areas of activity include leisure, education and health.

The housing division is the largest provider of new-build social housing in the country, with the largest programme of work utilising Off Site Manufacturing (OSM) techniques.

Inspace — five dedicated business streams

Willmott Dixon's new £100 million support services business, Inspace, operates through five business streams.

Inspace Maintain is already one of the largest nationwide fabric maintenance businesses with a branch network covering all of the major cities across the country.

The Inspace Environment engineering maintenance business, acquired recently from Shimizu Europe, is responsible for the ongoing maintenance of mechanical and electrical services in more than 50 major City and West End of London buildings.

Inspace Partnerships is already recognised as the leading partnering provider in the local authority best-value market for repairs and maintenance.

Inspace Interiors, the company's refurbishment and fit-out

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Nick Jennings
IT Project Manager, Willmott Dixon

business continues to develop a significant presence in the interiors market, while Inspace Complete is the company's in-house design, install and furnish solutions provider.

Willmott Dixon is a widespread and diverse company, which makes email especially important to the continuing success of this major construction and related services business.

As Nick Jennings, Willmott Dixon's IT Project Manager, tells us: 'Our email system has become of paramount importance to our day-to-day operations. It's difficult to quantify the cost of server downtime in cash terms, but any disruption to our email would certainly make a big impact on efficiency.'

There are 850 email addresses currently on the Willmott Dixon email system. The company uses electronic messaging to keep in close touch with suppliers, clients and subcontractors, as well as staff working in the field. Over the past 12 months, this traffic has seen nearly half a million emails pass through the company's gateways.

Cleaning up after Nimda and Goner attacks

The event which finally prompted Willmott Dixon to buy the MessageLabs anti-virus service was the unannounced arrival of the Nimda virus, just before Easter 2002 — followed rapidly by a visitation from Goner.

'Nimda disrupted us for four days,' says Nick. 'We had to divert virtually all our IT resources to the clean-up. If you consider that it takes two people two days to rebuild a server and to retrieve as much back-up information as possible, then you can see how labour-intensive a clean-up can be.'

'Even though we were able to shut down our system quickly, enormous damage had been done. I remember actually watching Nimda spread — we saw files being replicated like wildfire. As we removed these files it would start happening all over again and we saw a second server go.'

'No sooner had we recovered from the Nimda attack than Goner showed up. Fortunately we knew where the virus had got in, so we were able to shut down the system and hammer the infection quickly. But it proved that a virus strike was never going to be a one-off event. We just looked at one another and said: we can't be doing this. So we signed up for MessageLabs's anti-virus service just after Easter 2002.'

In only one year after the system going live, more than 943,000 emails have passed through the company's gateway,

while almost 1,600 viruses have been stopped by MessageLabs. The figures also show a surprising total of 186 viruses stopped on their way out of the company's network. However, Nick Jennings makes an important point about this. 'That figure represents the initial period. One of the advantages of the MessageLabs service is that we were quickly able to identify and eradicate viruses that were still within our system after the Nimda and Goner outbreaks. If you look at more recent figures, you'll see that we now send out zero viruses.'

'Even so, we still keep AV software on our desktops and servers as a guard against viruses entering the system at PC level, whether by somebody sticking a corrupted disc into a machine or downloading a virus from the Internet.'

A key benefit of the MessageLabs anti-virus service, says Nick, has been the increase in productivity of IT staff. With seven people working at the head office in Shefford, Bedfordshire, and 12 located at various sites across the company, the team is now free of the reactive work in firefighting virus outbreaks.

The accurate statistics provided by InSight, MessageLabs's customer reporting system, have also enabled Nick and his team to tailor their capacity planning to exact requirements. 'Previously it was all a bit finger-in-the-air, assessing our email traffic volumes, but InSight tells you straight away, which is very valuable knowledge to a growing company like ours. And whenever we've had to add new domain names with company acquisitions and changes, it has happened almost instantly.'

It's also valuable to the IT team to be able to present to senior management rigorously accurate reports which demonstrate the outstanding return on investment that the MessageLabs service represents.

MessageLabs anti-virus — 'a brilliant job since day one'

'We've been completely delighted with the service,' says Nick. 'It was implemented quickly and it worked straight away. We've had absolutely no technical problems with it — and it's been doing its job brilliantly since day one.'

'It's interesting that when other anti-virus vendors contact us, trying to sell their particular solution, as soon as we tell them we've already got MessageLabs, they back off. They know there's no way they can compete with MessageLabs's service — and most actually admit this to us.'

For more information on a proactive email security service, working around the clock and around the globe, visit www.messagelabs.com