

Company: Iris International

Industry: International marketing



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Andy Eakins, IT Director, Iris International

The challenge: Ensuring a totally reliable backup

Iris' mission is marketing, and its slogan sums it up: "Media Anything, Idea Everything". Iris helps create a message for clients including Adidas, Coca-Cola, and Manchester United, and then gets that message across by any means, from Facebook to TV to events.

The company's successes include Sony Ericsson's Music Monster, and the launch of the Adidas-Polar integrated training system. It also carries out ground-breaking research into the power and potential of brands.

This sort of media work needs connectivity, by definition. Iris has 400 staff in an office in Blackfriars, London, and they all need the Internet to do their jobs. It has a remote data centre also in London, and connections to the outside world.

The company needs to be able to rely on those links - so it has to have good backup.

Implementing Urban Wimax

Urban Wimax uses a 'standards-based' Wide Area Network technology that provides high-throughput broadband connections over long distances. It is an intelligent technology that supports many different types of application, from videoconferencing through remote access to web surfing, all at high level of service.

Iris has a 100Mbps fibre connection from Colt Telecom to a data centre nearby in London, and has a 40Mbps connection on from there to the Internet.

These links are essential to the business, so there must be some back-up. This was provided by a 10Mbps SDSL line - until early in 2008, when IT director Andy Eakins realised he needed something more.

"I was walking down the road and, in a hole in the ground, I saw a piece of cable cut by a digger," he says. "That's when I realised we needed wireless backup." There is a lot of building work in the Blackfriars area, and Iris' SDSL backup connection, like its main fibre link, was in an underground cable. If any builder or utility worker broke the main link, there was a strong possibility the back-up would go too.

"I had a good knowledge of 'standards-based' Wide Area Network technologies from a friend in San Francisco " says Eakins. "When we heard of Urban Wimax, it was an easy decision."

Iris has a 10Mbps symmetric service from Urban Wimax, which costs roughly the same as the SDSL line it replaced, but reaches the company without a cable. Installation was easy, says Eakins: "The hardest part was getting permission from the building manager for an antenna on the roof - and that was easy."

The Urban Wimax line is a redundant emergency system, so no live traffic normally goes over it. "It's held in reserve - if our Internet connection goes down, we've arranged for automatic switch-over as part of our contingency plan."

It could be needed at any time. "The roads around us are being dug up like a moat," says Eakins. The Urban Wimax link and fibre has already come into its own when an upgrade at the data centre disabled its connectivity. That outage lasted a couple of hours, and happened in the evening, but cut-across was smooth.

Continued...

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Iris is confident that the Urban Wimax service will keep the company connected if the fibre goes - because it's been tried and tested. The Urban Wimax and fibre are terminated in the same firewall, and the company tested the cut-over when the Urban Wimax service first arrived, turning off the fibre, and letting the firewall switch from one network to the other while live users were online.

No one saw more than a couple of seconds' delay in Internet traffic, as the firewall adjusted its internal settings, according to Eakins' colleague Rory Tabaray. The automatic switch-over is so quick, it would happen before the IT department is aware there's a problem.

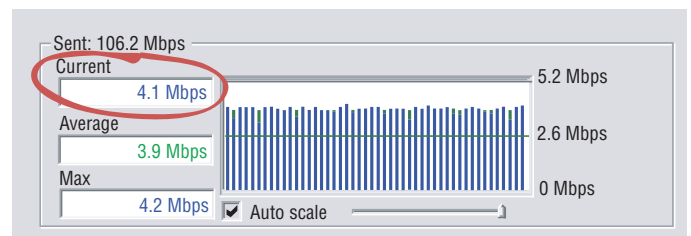
There's no way to put a figure on the value of a contingency plan, says Eakins, but in a year's time he expects the total usage will have amply justified the cost. 10Mbps is enough to back-up the whole company - and the test proved it.

Future plans

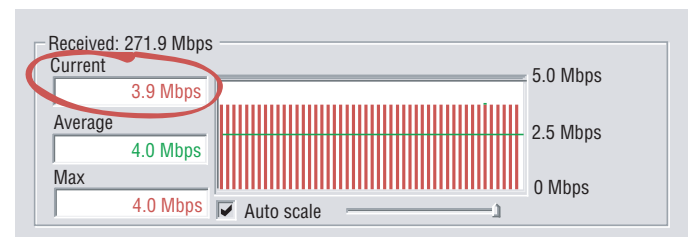
Iris doesn't have immediate plans to expand the Urban Wimax service, which meets its current needs, but it has already come into its own for testing future additions to the company's network.

The Urban Wimax link is an ideal test-bed. Future applications can be tried out on a good quality link where there is no risk of interfering with existing services. Iris tested a virtual private network (VPN) on its Urban Wimax link, and expects to test the ability of the service to carry voice packets using SIP (the session initiation protocol).

Urban Wimax Independent Test Results



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Summary:

Key Benefits:

- A wireless service means Iris is safe against physical network outages
- Firewall automatically switches across to the Urban Wimax link when there is a problem with the wired link
- 10Mbps service can stand in for Iris' fibre link in an emergency
- The bandwidth is held in reserve, but can be used as a test bed for new applications

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