

CIS Insurance uses RapidNet to upgrade to a 12,000+ point, Cat6 cabling infrastructure with no disruption to staff



Structured cabling manufacturer HellermannTyton has been chosen by CIS Insurance (part of Co-operative Financial Services) to provide the new cabling infrastructure at its Manchester headquarters - the CIS tower. HellermannTyton's unique pre-terminated RapidNet solution was specified for the project, which involved upgrading CIS's 20-year old IBM token ring type 1 cabling system to a modern, high-performance Cat6 infrastructure. Installed by specialist contractor Cable & Wireless, RapidNet's flexibility, reliability and ease and speed-of-installation meant that the 12,000 point, 25-floor installation could be completed on-time and on-budget with no disruption to staff.

Background

Established in 1867, CIS is Britain's only cooperative insurance company and along with The Co-operative Bank, forms the Co-operative Financial Services group. CIS provides financial services including life, home and motor insurance, pensions, with-profits bonds, critical illness products, unit trusts and ISAs to approximately 4.7 million customers in the UK - administering more than £20 billion.

The CIS tower in central Manchester was built during the 1960s and is currently Manchester's biggest building. As CIS's UK headquarters it houses more than 3000 staff, including call centre and trading floor employees as well as the main office/administration support functions.

Out with the old

Mike Philburn, Core Network Services Consultant at CIS was given the task of modernising the cabling infrastructure. He comments: "IT has advanced a long way in the 20-years since our legacy IBM token ring type 1 cabling system was installed. Quite understandably, the network was struggling to cope with the daily demands placed upon it by the 3000+ employees and 4000+ devices on the network."

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Philburn continues: “The speed and reliability of our IT infrastructure is an influential factor in CIS’s ability to operate effectively as an organisation and deliver a quality service to our customers. With the legacy system it was not uncommon for the IT department to have to fix six or more outages during an average week. The lost manhours as a consequence of this level of downtime was costing CIS considerably and was unacceptable. The system was not up to the job and had to be replaced with a cabling system that would more than meet the daily demands placed upon it and be able to cope with future growth.”

Making the choice

CIS researched a number of options and whittled these down to two. Philburn comments: “After considering a number of options, we chose HellermannTyton’s RapidNet over the Systimax solution. As the project was not a new-build – all floors were fully populated - we had to undertake the installation with minimal disruption to staff. RapidNet’s unique flexibility and ease and speed of installation meant that installer Cable & Wireless could carry out the work during nights and weekends leaving the offices fully operational during regular hours.”

In addition, many of the solutions put forward by competitive suppliers had waste and storage issues which were not compatible with CIS’s strong sustainable development policy. HellermannTyton’s RapidNet has no wastage and returnable reels – fitting perfectly with CIS’ green business ethics.

As well as the quality product offering, HellermannTyton’s excellent customer service and support made a lasting impression on CIS. Philburn comments: “HellermannTyton was extremely accommodating to our requirements and always willing to go the extra mile. During the early stages when we were making our decision we were invited to HellermannTyton’s manufacturing facility in Northampton to inspect RapidNet. This really gave us confidence in the product and the quality way it is manufactured. HellermannTyton also has the capability inhouse to answer questions on technical issues if we require further help. On a number of occasions HellermannTyton’s Directors have personally made the trip up to Manchester.”

The technology solution



The RapidNet solution used at CIS is a pre-terminated 'plug and play' system which removes the need for difficult and time consuming on-site termination. RapidNet's innovative system helps eliminate the margin of error. The cable is terminated at HellermannTyton's manufacturing facility, in a quality-controlled environment, and the systems arrive pre-labeled and pre-tested.



This not only guarantees quality and performance, but also dramatically reduces the installation time by up to 75% on unshielded (UTP) systems and by as much as 85% on shielded and fibre systems. Additionally, the system has the advantage of being easy to disconnect. The associated ends can be moved to a new cabinet location without the need for tooling or termination processing.

In November 2004 a four-man team from specialist contractor Cable & Wireless began a pilot installation on the building's seventh floor which was completed in just two days. After the success of the pilot the project was given the green light and over the following 12-months the Cable & Wireless team spent evenings and weekends systematically installing RapidNet on the remaining 24-floors. The installation was finally completed in November 2005.

The old cabling layout did not have enough out lets to meet demand and had fragile outlets under desks which if accidentally kicked could bring down the whole network. In order to increase the capacity, the design involved creating holes in the floor and running looms of RapidNet cables through. Each box, which used to contain just one outlet, now contains three or more Cat6 outlets. This means that on a standard tower floor the average capacity has increased capacity from 76 IBM type 1 outlets to 381 Cat6 outlets.

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Overcoming challenges

The building, which was built in the early 1960s, presented some serious challenges to the installation. Each floor of the CIS tower has its own comms room containing the patch frames, patch panels and network switches. Space inside these rooms is very restricted which, using traditional installation, would have presented a serious challenge to Cable & Wireless. Not only would it have been particularly difficult for the team to terminate the cabling in such a confined space, but also, the time the installation would have taken would have made working conditions extremely hot and uncomfortable. RapidNet by nature of the fact that it is pre-terminated meant that the restricted space was not a problem and the quick installation time reduced the uncomfortable working conditions.

Another challenge presented by the building was the shallow concrete floor which was not deep enough for a suitable bend radius to be maintained. This would have seriously impacted on the system's ability to perform to Cat6 specification. Faced with this obstacle, HellermannTyton quickly responded by designing a bespoke outlet for CIS' requirement which allowed proper bend radius and performance to be achieved.

HellermannTyton's Sales and Marketing Director, David Gagel, adds: "At HellermannTyton we pride ourselves on being able to respond to our customers unique requirements. Because of our UK-based headquarters with manufacturing and product design facilities we were able to help CIS overcome its shallow floor problem by designing and making the bespoke outlet quickly and locally so as not to delay the project programme."



A third challenge was presented midway through the project when CIS management decided they wanted to dedicate a floor of the building to a new call centre. Philburn comments: "The new 1800 outlet call centre is situated on one of our podium floors which is five times the size of a normal floor. As it was not part of the original plan HellermannTyton had to increase production to be able to accommodate the extra outlets."

The flexibility they showed in meeting this requirement – seemingly effortlessly - was great and relieved a great deal of pressure. The new cabling system is imperative to being able to run the call centre operation. There is no way that this would have been possible with the old system."

Professional service

During the project HellermannTyton has played a prominent role as technical advisor. Gagel comments: "We aim to provide our customers with the best and most affordable solution, and one that is able to grow with their business. During the project we worked closely with CIS and installers Cable & Wireless – particularly the early stages to ensure product was delivered on time and that our recommended installation procedures were being followed so that the project ran smoothly."

Philburn concludes: "The sheer size and complexity of the cabling project at the CIS tower meant that I approached the project with trepidation because there were so many potential pitfalls. I'm delighted with how smoothly everything has gone in reality and what's more, we've been able to complete the project three months ahead of schedule. I am positive that there is no way that the project could have been completed so efficiently without RapidNet. There is also clearly a close relationship between HellermannTyton and Cable & Wireless, which really helped the project run slickly and enabled the quick resolution of any technical issues. Perhaps most importantly we were able to achieve our key objective of completing the installation without any major outages or disruption to office staff. The new network is a quantum leap forward from the old system in terms of performance and reliability."



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