

Deacons implements unified communications and a centralised IT infrastructure with Nextgen Networks



When Top 10 law firm Deacons wanted to centralise its IT infrastructure for lower costs, better network performance and a reduced carbon footprint, Nextgen Networks' VPLS Ethernet VPN solution provided the bandwidth, flexibility and self-management features it was looking for.

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Andrew Pritchett, Infrastructure Manager, Information Technology, Deacons.

Deacons Customer Profile:

Industry: Law

Size: 5 locations – 1000-plus staff

Snapshot: Deacons is a Top 10 Australian law firm specialising in commercial law and providing legal services to over half of the ASX Top 500 companies.

Objective:

To provide unified communications over a self-managed, high-speed network and consolidate IT infrastructure for better performance, operational efficiencies and reduced carbon footprint.

Approach:

Take advantage of the multi-access options available through Nextgen Networks' VPLS solution to set up a high speed, highly secure, national data network that can be managed entirely from a centralised location.

IT Benefits:

- Centralised management of national data network and Internet
- Ability to self-manage bandwidth and Quality of Service for individual applications
- Easy connection of new sites
- Use of multi-access technologies for connections to national data network
- Significant bandwidth availability

Business Benefits:

- Reduced costs of national data carriage
- Enabled consolidation of network infrastructure into a centralised location
- Improved long-haul data performance
- Improved availability of critical business applications for internal and external clients
- Reduced cost of IT support through network management efficiencies
- Reduced maintenance engagement costs from the carrier

About Deacons:

Deacons is one of Australia's Top 10 international law firms with a network that spans Australia and Asia. Specialising in commercial law and providing legal services to over half of the ASX Top 500 companies, Deacons employs over 1000 legal staff at five locations – Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Canberra.

Deacons' IT department provides a range of services that are increasingly critical to the operating processes of legal staff including unified communications, Voice over IP (VoIP), video conferencing and remote access where reliable, flexible high-speed data carriage is required.

Reliable access to large amounts of data

The practice of law, like most industries, has seen exponential increases in the volume of data managed and used in day-to-day business processes. Core applications such as practice management, document management and communications are now totally reliant on staff and external clients being able to quickly and reliably access large amounts of data from anywhere in Australia or elsewhere in the world.

According to Andrew Pritchett, Deacons' Infrastructure Manager, Information Technology, the main challenge is to provide uninhibited, authenticated access to its systems for all of its internal and external clients.

"We aim to provide unified communications with high-speed, remote access and to consolidate our infrastructure so we can manage it more effectively," Mr Pritchett said. "At the same time it is now a declared corporate value of Deacons to reduce and minimise our carbon footprint."

"We were previously using Nextgen's point-to-point fibre connections but as our needs changed, we required greater resilience across our entire WAN to improve service to internal and external clients."

Supporting centralised infrastructure

Deacons has transformed its data service delivery process by centralising its server infrastructure into Melbourne. A key component of this strategy was to upgrade its high speed data service with Nextgen Networks.

A 200Mb/s link now connects Deacons' Melbourne office to Nextgen's national fibre-optic network, which is the third largest fibre network in Australia. Deacons also utilises Nextgen's award-winning VPLS Ethernet VPN service which provides a fully meshed, secure, full-featured Ethernet network that connects all customer sites nationally.

Effectively, with a 100Mb/s link from Nextgen's fibre network to the Sydney office and 40Mb/s links to Brisbane, Canberra and Perth the VPLS service connects all of Deacons' five sites into a single Wide Area Network with Layer 2 features such as self-management and end-to-end Quality of Service (QoS).



"Nextgen were able to provide all the fibre tails into our offices and the migration from our old point-to-point service went very smoothly," Mr. Pritchett said. "It is mainly our data tracking that we now run on the VPLS. Having a centralised infrastructure means that our data tracking through Melbourne is quite high."

"We need this very reliable, high-speed VPN set-up because remotely accessing multiple large documents and responding to emails are critical to the way our legal staff need to operate. We have well over 10 million documents within the document management system that are accessible from anywhere on the network, so the scale of the implementation for our centralised infrastructure was huge."

"We wanted a faster data service with a simpler configuration that would also allow us to self-manage quality of service as well as provide complete interoperability with our other systems. Basically, we didn't want to require involvement from the carrier in the day-to-day management of our long-haul data network."

Nextgen VPLS

Reduced server fleet

According to Mr. Pritchett, upgrading its point-to-point data services to the VPLS service has been a key facilitator to Deacons' centralising its IT infrastructure. Access to the high-speed long-haul fibre network has helped to decommission 100 servers across the country with no negative impact.

"I think that one of the key features of Nextgen was their ability to work closely with other partners to help us effect a massive transformation in the way we manage our data and make it available to legal staff and external clients," Mr. Pritchett said. "VPLS is just a component of that whole project but it is quite a big component."

Distributing data on demand

Nextgen Networks worked closely with systems integration experts Getronics to complete the network configuration.

It now manages core business applications centrally and distributes data on demand for all Deacons' practice management, document management, email and Internet. There is also sufficient bandwidth to use as a back-up network for VoIP and video conferencing.

"We have significantly quicker response times than on the point-to-point system. In particular, we saw a significant increase between our Perth and Melbourne traffic speed. Now there is not much difference between Perth to Melbourne and Sydney to Melbourne."

Flexible, open and transparent

"The technical expertise provided by Nextgen was exceptional and the speed of implementation exceeded the project's deadlines," Mr Pritchett said. "They were very easy to work with and that's a really positive thing. They were very flexible, very open and transparent. They let us know exactly what we needed to know when we needed to know it."

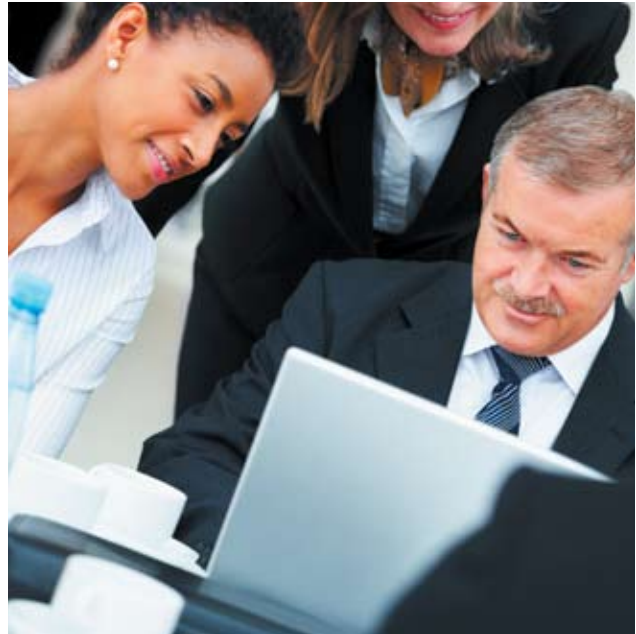
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Tangible bottom line benefits

Mr Pritchett said that there were tangible bottom line benefits that could be directly attributed to Nextgen's VPLS service. These included reduced data carriage costs, a better performing network and complete flexibility in self-managing configurations.

"Nextgen proved to be exceptional value based on price alone and were by far the most competitive of all the carriers we spoke to," Mr Pritchett said. "In addition, our staff definitely have quicker access times for documents and emails and we have the ability to guarantee quality of service to all sites (even remotely) on critical applications they use."

From a technical point of view, since upgrading its point-to-point data services contract to the VPLS service, Deacons has been able to perform any network changes required – such as IP addressing, VLAN use or equipment replacements – without incurring the delays and coordination overheads of involving the carrier. This reduces maintenance engagement costs from the carrier as well as significantly reducing the complexity of managing the WAN.



"Nextgen's VPLS service has enabled us to centralise our infrastructure and in doing so we have reduced our server infrastructure by around 50 per cent, while having no negative impact on the business."

"Meanwhile, from a greenhouse, carbon emissions perspective, reducing the number of servers has not only saved us a lot of money but the environmental impact is also massive. We reduced power consumption on top of the reduced licencing, hardware and software costs. We have increased the performance and reliability of our IT operations while decreasing our costs and carbon footprint."

Self-managed Quality of Service

“Quality of Service management is also an important VPLS feature for Deacons. On average, we are currently only utilising about 20 per cent of our total capacity but it is comforting to have that extra bandwidth at our disposal. It means that we can immediately switch our VoIP and/or video conferencing applications to this network if we need to.

Extending the relationship

The success of the VPLS service implementation has encouraged Deacons to look at expanding its relationship with Nextgen Networks.

“We have subsequently entered into a co-location agreement that will be the foundation for a high level disaster recovery and business continuity solution.”

“A great thing about the Nextgen VPLS-based network is that it is fundamentally very sound and simple. Configuration and ongoing management are very intuitive and transparent compared to the point-to-point. We would not have been able to have an active/active or active/passive backup LAN without it.”

“Also, there are times when we need to move large amounts of data around – doing backups or mailbox migration, for example – and with our bandwidth capacity we can do that anytime without impacting on our users.”

“ They were very easy to work with and that’s a really positive thing. They were very flexible, very open and transparent. They let us know exactly what we needed to know when we needed to know it. ”

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ABOUT NEXTGEN NETWORKS:

Nextgen Networks is a specialist provider of high performance data services and solutions. A member of the Leighton Group, Nextgen Networks owns and operates Australia’s third largest fibre optic network and Australia’s first national VPLS network. Its customers include managed network service providers, network integrators, carriers, corporations and government agencies.

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