

Case Study AeroSuperBatics

AeroSuperBatics is the only official aerobatic wingwalking stunt team in Europe and has used Equinet's NetPilot Internet Server Appliance to simplify its Internet access.

All of the company's email and web access requirements are covered by a single NetPilot box, which also connects its eight PCs together and enables them to share files.

The staff - many of whom perform the daredevil stunts themselves - are responsible for managing and booking customer orders, scheduling flying times with event co-ordinators and managing sponsorship arrangements. The Internet is a huge help in undertaking these tasks.

AeroSuperBatics first looked at investing in a 'traditional' network of a file server, a hub and a modem but they found that NetPilot could do all of this for less cost, and was easier to install and maintain.

In the future, the company will use NetPilot to support Internet at both its main office in Gloucestershire and a potential new office in London.



Case Study

AeroSuperBatics

If you're a company that earns its money by employees venturing out onto the wings of vintage planes in mid flight, then a simple matter like organising Internet access for your PCs might seem like child's play. But AeroSuperBatics, which runs two aerial stunt teams from its base in Cirencester, Gloucestershire, found that maintaining email and web access using a series of individual dial-up access accounts was a time consuming and frustrating approach.

AeroSuperBatics performs daredevil stunts known as wingwalking at social functions and public events across the UK through much of the year. It has secured corporate sponsorship arrangements and appears as the Utterly Butterly Barnstormers wingwalking team and Mitsubishi Motors' Red Zebra aerobatic team. The latter uses a passenger aircraft which takes off and lands on a trailer at 70 mph.

Business Administration Requirements

The staff - many of whom perform the daredevil stunts themselves - are responsible for managing and booking customer orders, scheduling flying times with event coordinators and managing sponsorship arrangements. All of this results in a sizeable administrative burden, and one that became a good deal easier with the introduction of PCs several years ago. But while staff were finding that they needed to share information more easily between PCs, there was also an increasing need to correspond with customers and suppliers through email, and to access data on the web about events at which the teams were performing, safety issues and all manner of other information resources.

The problem with AeroSuperBatics' existing Internet access arrangements, however, was that they were labour intensive to maintain: managing a series of dial-up Internet access accounts for each PC meant that each access service had to be treated individually. The accounts were paid for individually, problems had to be rectified individually and adding another user meant going through the set-up process all over again.

Added to that was the issue that each PC functioned as a standalone device. If staff wanted to share information between themselves or pass on a task to a colleague for completion, they had to save the data on a diskette and hand it over. Again, this was time consuming and often inefficient.



Equinet Limited, Edison House, Edison Road, Dorcan, Swindon. SN3 5JX United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)1793 603700 Fax: +44 (0)1793 603701 email: info@equinet.com
www.equinet.com

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Shared Internet Access

Initially, the company looked into ways of networking its eight PCs using the conventional small network approach of a file server, a hub and a modem, as well as making provisions to be able to connect them to PCs at a prospective new office in London. The PCs also needed to be able to share a database containing details of forthcoming events, and use a central print server.

AeroSuperBatics spoke with three computer dealerships about how this file server-based approach would solve its needs, but began evaluating other solutions when the proposed systems alone came to £12,000, plus technical installation costs at an average of £625 a day.

Instead, AeroSuperBatics began discussing its Internet access situation with Equinet. Equinet is a provider of Internet server appliances that create an extremely simple yet cost-effective way for all PCs to share Internet access capabilities, but which also allow PCs to be networked together.

Equinet's NetPilot system, priced at £1,495, was developed specifically to meet the Internet access requirements of smaller firms such as AeroSuperBatics, and has since been joined by the NetPilot Enterprise, a system designed for larger firms, but featuring the same simplicity and performance.

Equinet recommended that AeroSuperBatics connected all its PCs through a NetPilot. Within an hour of it arriving on site, Equinet engineers had the system connected to the database and printer, and in another hour had all the PCs set up for email and web browsing. The device now allows the company to share Internet access simply and cost-effectively, mainly because there is just one access account required, rather than eight.

NetPilot Takes Off

Since implementing NetPilot, the company has seen email become a valued business tool, used for managing orders from customers, distributing promotional material and simplifying all areas of business administration across its eight PCs. Meanwhile, the web has become an invaluable research tool. Staff numbers increase to 15 people in the main flying season, so the flexibility of NetPilot to add and delete users simply and quickly has provided a major advantage.

"We get inundated with customer enquiries from all over the country and our old Internet access setup was creaking under the strain," said Vic Norman, managing director of AeroSuperBatics.

"Using NetPilot, we were able to make the switch to a cheaper and more effective way of using the Internet and needed no real technical knowledge to do so.

"We originally thought the best way to approach this was to get our computers networked and that would in turn make the Internet easier for us. But NetPilot does all of this in one go."

Future Needs

As NetPilot is scalable and more than one of the machines can be placed together to accommodate more users, AeroSuperBatics plans to use it as a core Internet access system for some time to come.

The next stage in the company's evolution will be the opening of a second office in London, which will serve as a satellite office for managing corporate relations and a base from which to manage the company's involvement in major public events.

"Just because our London operation will be smaller than Cirencester doesn't mean that the new office won't have the same need to access the Internet. In fact it will probably mean that we become even more dependent on email and the web, as running between PCs with a diskette certainly won't be an option any more. Making the Internet easier has already made a big difference to our day-to-day business and should continue to do so in future," said Mr Norman ■

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