

Case study OutSec

Broadband is key to providing a fast, cost-effective service

RICHARD and Vanessa Phillips, the husband-and-wife team behind Norfolk-based outsourced secretarial service company OutSec, are enthusiastic supporters of broadband.

So much so that they were active participants in a local campaign to bring the technology to their local area, some nine miles south of King's Lynn.

Their commitment to the cause is hardly surprising: without broadband, OutSec would struggle to exist.

The company uses the high-speed technology to receive dictated sound files from clients, such as lawyers, doctors and other professionals who need transcription services.

But it also delivers those files to an international network of experienced temps who transform the audio files into text format, editing and amending the copy where necessary.

OutSec's network of self-employed virtual temps relies on broadband because it allows them to work from home and to choose their own working hours.

The 80 workers are located around the world in different time zones, and can consequently deal with tasks requiring a



Broadband can enable home businesses to provide a highly responsive service

rapid turnaround from UK clients on a 24-hour basis.

One OutSec secretary, based in southern France, works from a barn that she and her husband are restoring. Another temp plans to emigrate to Australia and still work for OutSec.

For many clients, says Vanessa, OutSec's business model represents an opportunity to free up a cost area in their businesses.

'Many are thrilled to be able to hand over administrative tasks to a trusted third party at a reasonable price, as and when

they need to. Before, the only real option was to go to the expense of employing their own PA,' she says.

High-speed links provided by BT Business Broadband enable OutSec to provide a highly responsive service.

Vanessa says the network addresses most of the key issues surrounding data transfer that plagued older mechanisms.

'Transferring sound between two companies or locations presents all sorts of challenges. If you transfer dictation tapes by post they get delayed or, worse still, lost forever,' she says.

'Electronic sound files are better – but these files are still quite large, so they can cripple email systems and are prone to viruses and so on.'

OutSec's solution was to develop a software system, FileManager, that enables clients to log on to a file transfer protocol area on the OutSec web site.

With a password, clients can upload sound files captured on digital dictation devices for transcription over a broadband link.

Homeworkers, meanwhile, download those files from the system and type them up on their own PCs.

Both groups work via an easy-to-use interface accessed via a standard browser.

Richard says OutSec, which is growing at five per cent a month, has a business case that rests on what broadband delivers: 'the ability to quickly, easily and cheaply transfer sound files from clients,' he says.

Using the DSS sound file standard, says Richard, a 10-minute dictation can be captured in a 1MB file

Such a file might take many minutes to upload using a dial-up connection. On standard broadband, that time is cut to between 15 and 20 seconds – and Richard says you can reduce times even more using a faster broadband link.

'Broadband has been at the heart of our success. Without it, our growth would have been a lot slower,' he says.

'Teleworking would have been less cost-effective and we couldn't have provided the levels of service that keep our clients happy and win new business.'

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