

ExCeL

Creating the world's most technically advanced exhibition and conference centre



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Head of IT, ExCeL

The ExCeL exhibition and conference centre in London's Royal Victoria Dock opened in November 2000 and

provides extensive technical and logistical facilities to make event management and attendance a rewarding experience.

To meet its build objectives, ExCeL had to be sure it found the right partners. Tim Bayford, ExCeL's Head of IT explains: “We must focus continually on the customer, because without exhibition organisers and the exhibitors themselves, ExCeL wouldn't exist.”

Name:

London International Exhibition Centre (ExCeL)

Industry sector:

Business / Professional Services

Location:

Royal Victoria Dock, London

Business challenge:

Creating the world's most technically advanced exhibition and conference centre by designing and implementing a complex voice, data and video service in less than eight months.

Solution:

ntl was appointed as prime communications contractor with total project management responsibility for all other communications suppliers and ongoing responsibility for the provision of all voice and data services. Four years after the build and support contract, ntl's ongoing support was assured when it was awarded a six-year fully managed service contract for ExCeL.

Products:

Intelligent Network Services including:

- Structured Cabling Solution
- Managed LAN/WAN
- Wireless LAN
- IP Telephony
- IPTV
- Broadband Internet connection – 90 Mbps
- In Building mobile telephony solution
- PSTN
- ISDN

Business benefits:

ntl took on board the risk of integration, handled all supplier liaison and resolved technical issues, leaving ExCeL staff free to concentrate on day-to-day business. Among its many attractions ExCeL now boasts Europe's largest single-site voice-over-IP (VoIP) telephony system and is attracting big name exhibitors who value the flexibility and leading edge solutions offered via ntl.

"The ntl team understands this better than any other supplier I've come across. ntl doesn't provide excuses or put up obstacles relating to technical challenges that arise every day, they work flexibly in a difficult environment to provide solutions that keep ExCeL at the head of the field for voice and data services."

State of the art venue

ExCeL is the UK's newest and most technically advanced international exhibition, conference and event centre for Europe.

Located on a 100-acre site in London's Docklands, the venue spans 65,000 square metres of exhibition floor space, and comprises exhibition halls, banqueting and conference suites, retail outlets, restaurants, hotels, apartments and more than five function rooms. Timo Bayford explains: "Our vision was to get it right first time and build an IT and telecommunications platform that would support potential future requirements."

"It is a testament to what ntl originally achieved and to their continuing improvements to the infrastructure that when vendors call me offering various solutions, I can say to them hand on heart that we don't need them. Technology-wise, there isn't really anything that ExCeL and ntl can't do within this venue."

Evidence of the level of trust between involved parties comes in the form of an agreement signed between ntl and the 'In-Touch' team set up by ExCeL to take overall responsibility for the delivery of voice and data communications services within the venue.

As Tom Bennie, Managing Director of ntl's business division, explains, "Organisations are increasingly looking to external partners to manage their communications and ntl has a proven track record of supporting mission-critical systems for both the private and public sectors. We have a strong existing relationship with ExCeL and

are delighted to continue working with them, delivering reliable, cost-effective and secure communications."

A real time challenge

ntl was appointed in April 2000 and the venue opened just seven months later. Installing the copper and blown fibre cabling infrastructures in such a massive building to this tight time-scale was a major challenge in itself. But ntl also worked with other well known IT companies and had overall responsibility for ensuring that all the hardware, software, networking systems, the PBX and normal telephone services, pay phones and the mobile phone facilities were ready and working on time.

The scale of the project was large. Services were provided for back office staff, franchises and exhibitors. There are two exhibition halls which can be divided down to 10 individual halls, plus a further 60 rooms for hire. The main boulevard between the two halls houses entrances, food outlets and restaurants. On the upper level is the Platinum Suite conference centre. ntl was faced with the considerable complexity of ensuring every single service – from Internet access to IP Telephony – could be delivered securely to any of these areas within the venue.

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State-of-the-art VoIP

ntl used Cisco Systems' AVVID (Architecture for Voice, Video and Integrated Data) architecture to create a network based on advanced IP technology which is ideal for carrying voice, video and data traffic. The

results are clear for Timo Bayford: "ExCeL now boasts more Information and Communications Technology (ICT) facilities than almost any conference and exhibition centre in the world, offering data connection to V-LANs over structured cabling, Wireless LAN, Internet, ISDN, VOIP phones and analogue lines for voice, faxes, alarms, data and credit card verification lines." In addition, laptops, Wireless PC cards and other hardware can be hired directly from ExCeL-InTouch.

To address security issues, in addition to firewalls between the network and the Internet, every V-LAN is separate from one another. Exhibitors who need low-latency connections back to their company intranets, are provided with their own private V-LAN and real IP address by on-site ntl engineers. These connections are logically separate from the main ExCeL Private network.

Part of the team

Following on from ntl's successful installation of ExCeL's entire communications infrastructure, ntl was awarded an additional six-year fully managed service contract in 2004. ntl's responsibilities include the management and maintenance of the site's advanced IP network, and the installation and de-installation of all exhibitor communications. SLAs (Service Level Agreements) vary slightly according to equipment, but in the main ntl guarantees 99.95 percent uptime for all its services.

The onsite ntl team consists of a service manager and three engineers providing 24x7x365 support, with additional personnel brought in as needed for major events. Remote support and monitoring of the 2Mbit/s voice and 45Mbit/s Internet circuits is provided from ntl's Bromley and Crawley Court Network Management Centres.

Three events amply demonstrate the close trust and partnership between ExCeL and ntl.



World Travel challenge

The World Travel Market event is where 'Thomas Cook goes to purchase two million holidays for its customers'. The 2002 event was the largest IT project at ExCeL to date, with over 500 cabled services alone. "It was the first single event that completely filled the venue, meaning everything had to go live at the same time with no margin for errors," says Tim Bayford. "Some of the challenges that ntl rose to superbly were the long build period and the fact that they had to deliver hundreds of services to an empty floor space in readiness for construction."

Oracle solution

Oracle Apps World is an event focused on (and reliant upon) the latest technologies. A key challenge for

Oracle Apps World 2003 was the creation of a fibre network to provide a bespoke video network across multiple stands and multiple devices, controlled from a single temporary operations room. The fact that ntl managed this installation meant a lot less headache – both for ExCeL and Oracle. "Normally the Oracle data team would have set up and run this critical operation, states Tim Bayford. "But the fact that ntl was able to do this for them meant that it was up and ready before they even arrived, and Oracle engineers were able to get on with delivering the content successfully. ntl light tested every element of the network and ensured that the live video feeds didn't fall over." ntl's intelligent network design, also meant that it was straightforward to meet Oracle's request for two 34Mbit/s

links, by delivering a primary 45Mbit/s link and a 34Mbit/s back up connection. Meanwhile, at the Oracle Apps World registration desk, Oracle staff carried wireless scanners to record visitor details, and ntl provided a solution to allow real time 2Mbit/s connections between the off site core server and these devices.

The Boat Show

ExCeL is home to Schrodgers London International Boat Show which is the largest event held at the centre. In January 2004 ntl extended the core network to a temporary 10,000 square metres water sports arena housing a 30m x 70m pool, with fans generating 25 knots of wind and a grandstand for over 1500 people. As well as providing access to core IT and telecommunications services, links included a live web cam feed from the first ever UK National Indoor Windsurfing Championships held at the arena to the Information Desk's plasma screens in the main venue.

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A futuristic venue

For visitors, a trip to ExCeL is a futuristic experience. Event organisers can request to have set up wireless hotspots or total wireless coverage of the venue so with a wireless card in their computer or handheld, visitors can gain direct access to their office network, email and the Internet. Mobile phone facilities, which use ntl's In Building GSM solution, are also impressive. The normal difficulties of providing good reception on a mobile phone in a large building such as a conference hall have been overcome through strategically placed aerials around the location to enhance the

phone signals, so reception is excellent and coverage and capacity are both maximised.

IPTV has been used for a number of events, successfully delivering better than VHS quality to desktops and plasma screens, which is particularly

important when associated sporting events like windsurfing are being held.

Tim Bayford states: "We wanted a leading-edge partner with foresight. ntl has proved to be just that partner. It is totally market focused, and continually looks at the existing infrastructure

services for ways to improve and develop them. I don't think we could ask for more from any supplier. ntl has been flexible, pragmatic and open minded. They react quickly and work to the spirit of our agreement rather than the letter."

To find out more:

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