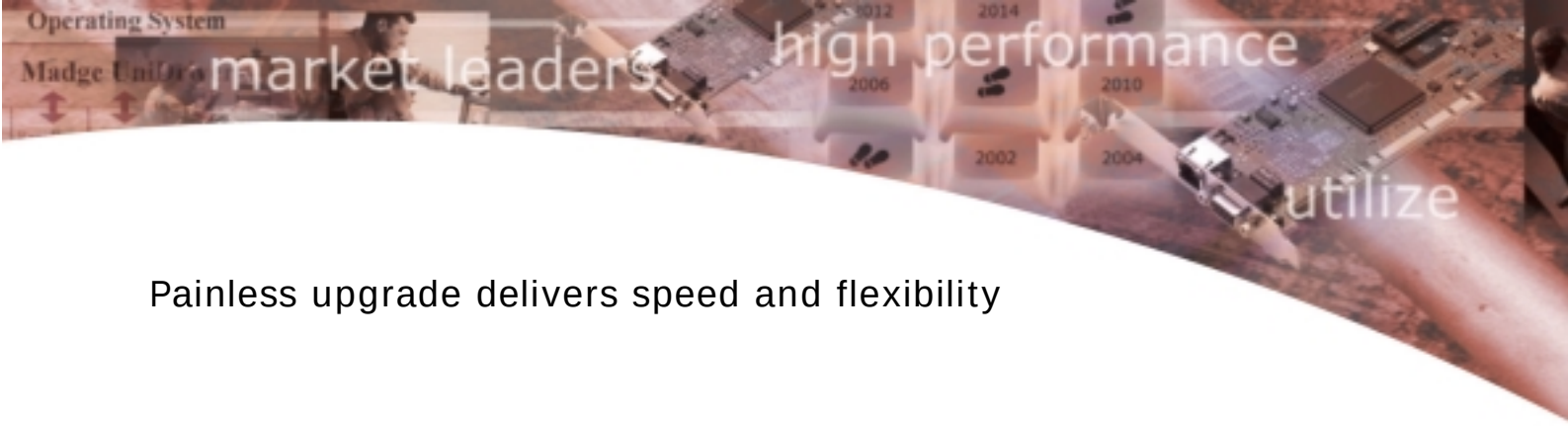

Painless upgrade delivers speed and flexibility

East Washington school moves to 100Mbps with zero downtime

Rodney Kluever still can't believe how well his recent network upgrade went. After all, going from a struggling shared network environment to a fully functioning switched 100Mbps Token Ring network should have caused just a little bit of disruption at the Yakima Valley School in Eastern Washington where he is Network Administrator. “I had planned for some downtime, of course, even though our network is usually needed 24 hours a day,” Kluever says. “But we literally had zero disruption. The whole upgrade was truly amazing. The users didn't even know anything had changed, except that network performance is now so much better.”

Yakima Valley School is part of the Division of Developmental Disabilities, a division of the US Department of Social and Health Services. It is home to some 150 people with a range of disabilities, and around 300 staff, who look after them around the clock. The computer systems play a crucial role in managing client information and in supporting their care while at the school. The network supports around 60 terminals and needs to be available at any time of day or night. The school is a long-term Madge customer, and was running a shared Token Ring network with MAUs, CAUs and LAMs linking them all together.

Kluever knew he wanted to expand the network and to increase performance to cope with a growing workload of mainly word processing attachments and spreadsheet files. He also wanted to increase the network's resilience: “I had always felt uncomfortable with the fact that if we lost a CAU, for example, everything else on the unit was down,” he says. “I wanted to get into a switched environment where every workstation had a dedicated port.”

He looked at all the options, including a wholesale move to Ethernet. But Kluever, who had worked with Ethernet in the past, doubted that this would be the right choice. “I was not convinced it could handle the amount of traffic and packet sizes we have,” he says. He decided therefore to stay with Token Ring, and Madge proposed upgrading to a switched environment that would give each user a dedicated 100Mbps port.

With a Ringswitch Plus and five Deskstream switches in place (two in one location and three in another, connected by copper to the Ringswitch Plus), they were ready to do the upgrade. “During the upgrade, the Madge people were all here to make sure it went smoothly,” he recalls. “Normally when you purchase something from a vendor, they ship it to you in a box and it is up to you to make sure it works. It was comforting to know they were here.”

Kluever had scheduled in some downtime to do the conversion, despite assurances from the Madge team that the users would not see any delay. “They were absolutely right - there was no delay,” he says. “Converting from the old Madge equipment was just a question of unplugging the old devices and plugging in the new ones. There was zero downtime.”

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Power and flexibility

The upgrade has already brought huge benefits. The high-speed backbone and dedicated connections have increased the performance of the overall system. “Before, there was a few seconds' lag time in pulling the information from the server. Once we went to switched operation it was practically instantaneous,” he says.

They were so comfortable with the new infrastructure they got rid of a lot of old printers that had been malfunctioning, and have replaced them with three Sharp copiers that can act as 55ppm printers. These now handle the job much faster than would have been possible with the old system. “There would have been too much traffic before, but now if people want to print, the document is usually waiting for them before they can get from their desk to the printer,” he says.

The whole infrastructure is also now more robust and easier to manage, thanks to Madge's Trueview network management software. “Trueview is amazing,” he says. “Every morning, it is the first software I load after my email. It gives me a full graphical view of the Deskstreams and my Ringswitch. I can see the traffic going across the various ports. I just need to look at the screen to see that if everything has a green light it's working, and if it's red, something is wrong.”
He cites one recent example: “The power supply to our Ringswitch was starting to fail, so it sent a warning to the Trueview software. I called Madge and they got in touch with a vendor they deal with and a new power supply was shipped in before the situation had become critical. We had zero downtime. The system had diagnosed the problem before it had started to affect us.”

With Trueview monitoring the system, it has freed up his time to do other projects, and to spend more time with computer users helping them to develop their skills. “I am confident because I know the software will alert me if anything starts to go wrong,” he says.

The new configuration also gives him maximum flexibility in future. If he wanted to add Ethernet for any reason, “it would be very easy to put a blade into the Ringswitch and we'd have Ethernet capability.” If they needed to go to Gigabit operation that would also be a simple upgrade.
One of his aims is also to introduce Voice over IP for the school's telephones. “With Token Ring and the switched environment, it would be fairly cheap and easy to do. We could start saving money very fast. I'm convinced that would be more difficult in an Ethernet environment,” Kluever says.

Currently in the process of upgrading the whole site from Windows NT Workstation to Windows 2000, he has also noticed the speed of the network when it comes to downloading the new system images on to each machine, using the Remote Installation Server. “Some users take 45 minutes to load their system image on Ethernet - we take 11 minutes. That's a major speed difference,” Kluever says.

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About Madge Networks N.V.

Madge Networks N.V. (NASDAQ NM: MADGF) is a global supplier of advanced networking product solutions to large enterprises, and is the market leader in Token Ring. Madge is pioneering next generation networking solutions, which enable the painless deployment of 100Mbps and Gigabit speed IP-based applications within existing corporate networks while protecting customers' investments in Token Ring. Madge Networks also has an associate company, Red-M™, a leading supplier of wireless networking product solutions. The Company's main business centers are located in Wexham Springs, United Kingdom and Manasquan, New Jersey. Information about Madge's complete range of products and services can be accessed at www.Madge.com.

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