

Doing business around the world

Jason Connolly, director at NGIT, looks at the IT challenges posed by opening an office in another jurisdiction, and the possible solutions



Channel Island businesses are broadening their markets and expanding into new territories as a way of diversifying their client base and tapping into new business streams. But opening new offices brings logistical and technological challenges, not least providing a robust IT system that is accessible from offices in multiple jurisdictions and time zones.

This trend is also contributing towards extensive business travel, and the need to access corporate emails and data while on the move. This provides unique challenges of providing fast and easy access, while maintaining security, and also overcoming difficulties with accessing systems in remote locations, often over slow internet links.

Reliable Remote Access – So how does a business securely share emails, documents, applications and databases across different offices? Systems have now been developed that allow staff at satellite offices to gain secure access to head office IT systems from anywhere in the world. The local computer remotely controls a central, virtual copy of the corporate desktop running on the Guernsey-based server. This avoids the need to transmit files to the remote site, and so can operate over slow and low bandwidth links. Recent remote access systems are much improved, and the end-user experience is very similar to sitting at a computer in the main office.

These remote access systems can be added to any organisation's existing internal IT infrastructure to enable sharing of systems between different offices, while maintaining control of sensitive data and security in-house.

This type of remote access system brings additional benefits for Channel Island businesses. Our predominantly small to medium-sized organisations can appear much bigger than they actually are, because staff are available even if they are not in the office. This also helps companies that offer flexible working to staff, as they can access information and work from home in the same way as if they were in the office. There is no doubt that IT will allow companies in all business sectors to make good use of Guernsey's finite workforce.

Cloud-based services – There has been an explosion in demand for cloud computing, which is particularly well suited for multi-jurisdictional offices. Because the technology is housed in a datacentre and is designed to be accessed remotely, the system is great for extending IT systems for use in multiple offices, supporting hot-desking and also remote access while travelling.

This makes this service offering ideal for Channel Island-based companies with satellite offices in different jurisdictions, taking advantage of built-in remote access technologies to centralise IT infrastructure in Guernsey. It also supports a growing trend of remote working from home or while travelling.

Businesses should think carefully before putting sensitive corporate data into the public cloud. In particular, local organisations should be sure of the physical location of their data in the cloud and how it is being secured. Cloud-based providers may store and replicate data in many different jurisdictions, each subject to their own data protection laws.

To mitigate this risk, consider local private cloud providers who guarantee that data is stored in Guernsey, avoiding data protection issues.

No such thing as a free lunch – With all offerings, full due diligence should be carried out on all software, but in particular for the lower-cost or free ones. Dropbox, for example, is a popular and free cloud-based service, great for home use. But there are numerous privacy and security concerns with online file sharing sites, reaffirming the need to understand how the product works before transmitting any sensitive business data.

So does it work? – We have a number of clients headquartered in Guernsey, but with remote offices in Jersey, UK, Malta, Dubai, Singapore, Shanghai and further afield. The local offices need only a connection to the internet and local computers with an internet browser. No additional software need be installed on these devices, minimising the need for support in the remote office.

The technology generally works very well, and to further support their multi-jurisdictional operations, we also provide support in their own time zones. Most importantly this enables businesses to open up additional offices with very minimal additional IT spend on equipment or local support, reducing upfront capital investment, retaining central control of systems and data, reducing risk and avoiding data protection issues.

As I write this, an email has just reached my inbox from a local accountant who recently moved to our private cloud system. 'The move to NGIT has proved very satisfactory and I recently worked a full and very productive week from Italy last month, so well worth the investment,' it read.

Multi-jurisdictional IT - In a world where the demand for information has never been greater, the integration of remote-access technology with email, applications and file repositories makes it easier than ever for lawyers, accountants, trust administrators and fund managers to work across multiple jurisdictions.

Technology is providing businesses with even more choice for easy and convenient access to corporate resources from anywhere in the world using a variety of devices, allowing them to remain productive and informed. Technology can enable new ways of working, enhancing efficiency, minimising cost, improving flexibility, enabling responsiveness and increasing the overall quality of client-service.