

HILLCREST WORKING WITH SOFTCAT AND IGEL

Hillcrest standardizes on IGEL IZ zero clients for group-wide desktop solution



Hillcrest Group of Companies updates desktop infrastructure for easy to manage, affordable and multimedia-ready solution across its 50 sites.

FEATURE QUOTE

“ If you put the time and effort to learn the UMS, it’s an excellent tool and makes life really easy. The beauty is you can make configuration changes which can be rolled out to all devices in minutes not hours. For example, a firmware update can be remotely done or even set up to update automatically out of office hours when staff aren’t about. ”

~ Ewan Sutherland,
Hillcrest Group’s IT operations engineer

Established in 1967, Hillcrest Housing Association is one of Scotland’s largest providers of social housing with over 6,000 quality properties. The group exists to enhance the quality of life of individuals and communities by providing a range of services and initiatives that improve housing, support and care, employment and training opportunities.

SUMMARY

The Customer

- Hillcrest Housing Association is one of Scotland’s largest providers of social housing
- Over 6,000 properties in Dundee, Edinburgh, Angus, Perthshire and Fife
- Provides a range of services and initiatives that improve housing, support and care, employment and training opportunities

The Challenge

- A replacement for ageing thin client desktops
- Dual screen requirements
- Capability to handle multimedia applications
- Simple management

The Solution

- IGEL IZ Series zero clients
- IGEL Universal Management Suite software
- Citrix XenServer and XenApp for VDI

Key Benefits

- Simplified central management
- Increased functionality for staff with dual screen and multimedia capability
- Staff time saved with reduced travel time for essential training

Hillcrest Group of Companies, a social housing, care, skills, training and employment organization, is updating its desktop infrastructure to provide an easy to manage, affordable, reliable and multimedia-ready solution for 800 staff across its 50 sites in Scotland.

The project will see the replacement of existing Axel thin client devices as they become end-of-life with new IGEL IZ series zero clients. These connect to a centralized Citrix server and desktop environment which underpins the whole organization. The project is already over 70% complete with over 200 Intel Atom-powered IGEL terminals now installed.

Hosted at its own datacentre, The Hillcrest Group has created a so-called Citrix farm based on a XenServer virtual server platform along with Citrix XenApp for Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI). Ewan Sutherland, Hillcrest Group's IT operations engineer, explains, "Staff connect and are presented with a customised desktop tailored to their group membership. Housing staff are presented with a branded desktop with applications specific to housing. Care staff are presented with a different desktop and range of available applications. And so on."

The advantage of this approach is that, rather than applications having to be installed for staff on individual devices, they are delivered based on the user's Active Directory group membership. Everything can then be managed easily and centrally - a massive boon for the IT team - given the group is diverse with staff on multiple locations. Sutherland says, "The IGEL terminals are powerful devices although we have them fairly well locked down so they currently act solely as Citrix clients for staff connecting to their work specific desktop"

Functionality built-in to support multimedia over a distributed network

Supplied by IGEL reseller, Softcat, The Hillcrest Group's choice of IGEL IZ series zero clients was driven not only based on price, reliability and low power consumption, but the ability to support multimedia as well as dual screens without a specialist adaptor having to be purchased. Dual screens are a key requirement for certain job functions within the organization who need access to various applications at the same time without chopping and changing systems.

IGEL IZ series zero clients support multimedia applications effectively over a distributed MPLS network which connects Hillcrest Group's 50 sites. This is key as The Hillcrest Group runs a lot of online training sessions for its disperse workforce having developed an Intranet called E-den which contains video, Microsoft PowerPoint and other documentation.

Sutherland explains, "It saves staff having to come from all over Scotland to Dundee HQ for training purposes some of which is compulsory. They can now complete it online and courses are automatically ticked off once completed"

In addition, IGEL IZ zero clients also enable staff to plug in external storage devices like USB flash drives and mobile phones so that files and folders can be copied easily.

Easy management of the desktop estate made easy by IGEL's UMS

Over and above product features, it is IGEL's Universal Management Suite (UMS) which has really impressed. Sutherland says, "If you put the time and effort to learn the UMS, it's an excellent tool and makes life really easy. The beauty is you can make configuration changes which can be rolled out to all devices in minutes not hours. For example, a firmware update can be remotely done or even set up to update automatically out of office hours when staff aren't about."

The IGEL UMS also directly helps operational staff. Sutherland explains, "If some-one is visually impaired, we can change their local screen resolution from HQ so it's easier for them to work and reset it once they have finished using the device. In addition, we can resolve 80-90% of day-to-day questions and issues remotely with the shadowing function. That's a huge time benefit for the IT team and everyone in the business."

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