



## **Work Without the Web – why businesses are hooked on their connection**

Chris Stening, MD of business Internet Service Provider, Easynet Connect looks at doing business without the web

### **We're hooked on the web**

Very little has changed the face of businesses more than the Internet. It has brought us some of the world's biggest companies and is responsible for powering entire industries. Now, twenty years after its invention, the Internet is set to help hundreds of businesses beat the recession.

For SMEs, the Internet can be both the 'bread and butter' of their IT strategies, powering basic tools such as email, as well as the 'icing on the cake' revenue-driving tools such as e-commerce platforms, online bookings systems and online marketing tools. No matter how your business uses the web, you should know just how a lost connection could affect day-to-day business.

A survey we carried out in 2008, showed that UK SMEs are well and truly hooked on the web; 71% of IT Managers we spoke with claimed their business could not cope for longer than a day without a connection and 21% unable to last longer than an hour.<sup>1</sup> With such high levels of web-dependency, it is important that every business has a clear understanding of how it relies upon Internet connectivity and does all it can to protect itself against an outage.

### **What does the web do for you?**

One of the first 'bread and butter' productivity tools that drives web dependency is email. Whether using Microsoft Exchange, or an online service like Google or Hotmail, all email relies upon a web connection. Businesses should also consider how much they rely on the data held within the bodies of emails and how much work they can do without access to that information, as often, this will be lost if your email service goes down. These factors are different for every type of business – however, for many companies, the availability of email can be crucial and being offline for just half a day might be too long.

### **The web driving productivity**

Beyond basic email, more businesses are relying upon Cloud Computing or Software-as-a-Service to power the 'staples' of their IT diets, accessing everything from document tools to CRM and accounting systems over their web connection. Cloud Computing applications are well fitted to small companies as they have low overheads and running costs and require less technical support, as upgrades are managed by the supplier. We

ourselves use cloud-based applications and overall 25% of small companies are looking to the cloud to help cut costs and drive revenues themselves.<sup>ii</sup> Each time a business moves an operation online however, the more important the quality and availability of their internet becomes.

Increasingly, customers are asking us about how Cloud Computing could affect their Internet connection, which, given that our own research shows an alarming lack of understanding amongst businesses can only be a good thing.<sup>iii</sup> The answers are normally straightforward – find out what bandwidth requirements are needed to enable the tools you wish to use and speak to your ISP about meeting these demands when added together with your other web-dependent processes.

In our latest piece of research, 72% of SMEs cited remote working as another way in which the web was helping cut costs and drive revenues in the recession.<sup>iv</sup> By giving employees the ability to access key IT tools via the web, the possibilities to drive productivity and save on costs become immediately evident. When many businesses were ground to a halt as a result of heavy snowfalls in early February this year, record numbers of workers ‘logged on’ from home via work-provided laptops, their home PCs or mobile devices providing a major boost for businesses looking to maintain productivity under extreme circumstances.

### **Web casting a wider net for businesses**

As well as powering basic but necessary business processes, the web helps millions of companies generate revenues and market themselves in ways which would have otherwise been unachievable. A smart website can help almost any business and is often the first point of contact with customers. For many, maintaining an effective web presence depends upon a reliable connection between your site (hosted on your servers) and the rest of the web.

In the last ten years, e-commerce has revolutionized the way we consume and do business and for many businesses it is their primary or sole revenue channel, be it selling products, paying for services or making bookings. Having an e-commerce site fail, or have the systems which link a site back to business HQ can seriously damage both revenues and reputation and whilst there are several factors in keeping an e-commerce system running, the Internet is often the glue which holds them together. So if your business is already relying on the web for revenues or you are amongst the 46% of businesses looking to launch new products on the web, then you should look to get a full understanding of how your web site or service functions and how it will impact your Internet connection.<sup>v</sup>

### **Protect yourself**

No matter how web-dependent your business is, the best way to protect your connection is to fully understand the ways in which Internet connectivity powers your business and to have a close relationship with your ISP. This means that you will be able to select the right connection for your businesses and put the right measures in place to protect against Outages. Common measures include installing a fully-redundant second line which will maintain your connection if your primary line fails and Service Level Agreements which will guarantee the right levels of connectivity that you need.

Businesses use the Internet in different ways and have different plans and strategies for ensuring their business continuity, but given the powerful ways in which the Internet enables so many aspects of business, it is easy to see how, no matter the size of loss or scale of inconvenience, there is never a right time to be without the web.

<sup>i</sup> ‘Soaring Not Surfing’ report carried out. by Quocirca on behalf of Easynet Connect, amongst 345 UK companies with 10-250 employees in May 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> Research carried out by Opinion Matters on behalf of Easynet Connect amongst 250 UK companies with 10-250 employees in January 2009

<sup>iii</sup> Only 13% of UK companies had a formal plan in place for switching to hosted applications. As part of the “Outlook cloudy as SMBs not ready for Hosted Apps” report carried out by Opinion Matters on behalf of Easynet Connect amongst 250 UK companies with 10-250 employees in September 2009

<sup>iv</sup>. Research carried out by Opinion Matters on behalf of Easynet Connect amongst 250 UK companies with 10-250 employees in January 2009

<sup>v</sup> Research carried out by Opinion Matters on behalf of Easynet Connect amongst 250 UK companies with 10-250 employees in January 2009