



Exponential-e faster!

Sports photography providers Action Images opt for a gigabit Ethernet solution in order to benefit from the much higher speed and cost savings available compared to leased line alternatives

Action Images is the leading sports photography provider and has a range of clients in international, national and regional publishing, television and new media. In addition to the media, Action Images is the official photographer for a number of sports clubs and governing bodies, such as FIFA and Sport England. The company was founded in 1983 and has quickly earned itself the reputation for being able to deliver the first and fastest sports photography around the world.

Action Images speciality has been in providing football images but this has now grown to cover most other worldwide sporting events including Rugby, Tennis, Athletics, Boxing, Motor Racing and Golf. Images are transmitted 'live' around the world on a daily basis so clients are able to access images moments after the action has taken place. Action Images also has an in-house processing lab and is at the forefront of digital imaging. The processing team works around the clock to ensure that high quality images are available quickly.

Images are provided to clients electronically via ISDN, FTP, email or modem, so the company understandably has requirements for high bandwidth, speed, and a highly reliable connection. Action Images employs leading specialist sports photographers from all over the world who use FTP to send pictures that they have taken of the latest sporting events and personalities. Therefore, Action Images has to download the pictures as quickly as possible, before trying to sell them for both commercial and editorial use. A high-speed connection is critical to this service as, at any one time, hundreds of people may be trying to view images while photographers are trying to FTP the latest pictures of sporting events.

"OUR CUSTOMERS CONSTANTLY BROWSING OUR SITE LOOKING FOR THE PERFECT SHOT FOR THEIR MARKETING COLLATERAL OR TO SUPPORT AN EDITORIAL PIECE. WE THEREFORE NEED TO GET THE LATEST IMAGES DOWNLOADED QUICKLY AND UP ON THE SITE, AND THE ADDITIONAL BANDWIDTH HAS ENABLED US TO DO THIS. THE FACT THAT EXPONENTIAL-E WAS SO MUCH CHEAPER THAN ALL THE OTHER PROVIDERS IS OBVIOUSLY A REAL BONUS. EVERYTHING HAS WORKED OUT VERY WELL, IN FACT WE HAVE HAD NO PROBLEMS WITH THE SERVICE AT ALL"

Action Images was using a 2Mb lease line connection from UUNet at a cost of £16,000 per year. Whilst the speed and reliability of this connection were sufficient, Action Images found that it needed more capacity to enable faster download speeds. Traditionally this would have involved bonding another 2Mb circuit together to double the capacity to 4Mb – although this would have cost the company over £30,000 with no guarantee that it would provide sufficient capacity to meet both its current and future requirements. Action Images did get a quote from WorldCom, which was offering a 4Mb connection for £30,000, but in November 2002 decided to shop around to try and secure a better deal.

One of the options available to Action Images was to consider Ethernet for its Internet connectivity instead of traditional leased lines as this offers a high speed, high quality, completely scaleable, low-cost alternative. As part of this process Action Images came across Exponential-e, a new, next-generation gigabit Ethernet provider with the largest metro Ethernet network in London offering Internet connectivity and point-to-point solutions.

Exponential-e has built its own fully redundant, Layer 2, MPLS pure Ethernet network offering connectivity around the UK. The London metro network is one of the most extensive Ethernet networks in London, going further west than any other provider (POPs in Gloucester Road and Heathrow) resulting in the services being available to approximately 80 per cent of companies in the London area.

The company has plans to extend this network internationally. POPs are currently in the City, Docklands and West London. Exponential-e has deployed the latest generation gigabit Ethernet switches directly into multiple dark fibre routes around London, creating high speed, ultra low latency, and resilient metro network. Connections can run at speeds from 2 Mbps to 1,000 Mbps. The network is one of the fastest, with companies only ever being 1-2 hops away from the backbone of multiple Tier 1 global Internet carriers, allowing the Exponential-e network to constantly select the best of the best routes around the world.

After evaluating Ethernet as an alternative, Action Images approached Exponential-e for a quote and was shocked to discover that Exponential-e could offer them a 10Mb connection for £24,000. This provided a massive cost saving over the 4Mb quotes it had received from other providers, for over double the amount of capacity.

IT Manager at Action Images, Greg Mawdsley, commented "At first we were sceptical because here was this unknown company offering us everything we wanted, and more. The fact that we can have more capacity than we actually need at the moment, for less than half the cost, made our minds up for us. There is no compromise on the quality of service by using Ethernet – it's reliable, fast and resilient, which is exactly what our business needs. In addition because Ethernet is flexible we will be able to upgrade the service at short notice in line with our business growth."

Action Images placed an order with Exponential-e and the service went live in February 2003. Exponential-e replaced the old copper circuits with a new fibre optic circuit running at 10Mbps into one of its City POPs. Action Images is actually located 7km away from Exponential-e's nearest POP, and had it been located within 5km even further cost savings would have been achieved.

With network reliability being a major concern for Action Images, it was pleased to learn that Exponential-e has several layers of resilience built into the network and uses multiple fibre providers around London. Its cutting edge use of MPLS provided sub-50ms automatic switchover to backup routes in the event of any problems on the network.

A major bonus in choosing Exponential-e was the fact that the service is presented as an RJ45 connection; therefore, it can be plugged straight into the existing firewall as a simple extension of the LAN. This meant no additional hardware costs to Action Images, and the service was easy to install and up and running straight away. In addition, Action Images uses a bespoke engine that runs its web site. This utilises referencing software which had embedded IP addresses that had originally been provided by UUNet, meaning that Action Images was tied to UUNet for these IP addresses. This software is critical to Action Images business as it is the main interactive tool that customers use to search for images online. As Exponential-e also offers a consultancy service, it was able to help out by providing local registration of provider-independent IP addresses, meaning that Action Images would no longer be tied to any one ISP and could take advantage of switching to Ethernet for its Internet connectivity.

Greg Mawdsley added "Time is of the essence in our business. Our customers are constantly browsing our site looking for the perfect shot for their marketing collateral or to support an editorial piece. We therefore need to get the latest images downloaded quickly and up on the site, and the additional bandwidth has enabled us to do this. The fact that Exponential-e was so much cheaper than all the other providers is obviously a real bonus. Everything has worked out well, in fact we have had no problems with the service at all." NC

For more information on Exponential-e's range of services visit www.exponential-e.com or call 020 7173 6222.