

Case Study: Venus Business Communications Ltd

Openreach customer reports 10-fold increase in business with Ethernet Access Direct

Although Venus Business Communications Limited can't be pigeon-holed as communications providers to the media production industry alone, there's no denying the fact that the company's growing hold on the acknowledged 'world centre for media production' in central London has played a major role in their quite spectacular growth. They have fingers in other pies, including the small to medium sized enterprise and financial sectors.

Just two months after establishing their first two Points of Presence (PoPs) in London's Soho and starting to consume the Ethernet Access Direct (EAD) service from Openreach, Venus reported a three-fold increase in business.

Eighteen months down the track, with 11 PoPs in the capital and more planned, Venus has amassed 10 times the number of customers they had before they adopted what amounts to an entirely new and patently tremendously successful operational model.

Things needed to change

Venus started out in the connectivity business around five years ago; selling fixed symmetrical leased lines supplied by BT Wholesale, Virgin and Colt. At the time, they were also dabbling in wireless connectivity and free space optics (delivered by rooftop lasers).

Justin Keery, Venus CEO, explains: "We've always been on the lookout for innovative technology, but wireless couldn't take the strain. Free space optics provided a similar service in terms of speed and performance to the Openreach EAD service we use exclusively today. However, we did experience alignment issues and the cost was high in comparison to EAD.

"The reality was that we had a small band of loyal customers, but the business wasn't really going anywhere. We clearly needed a different and far better operational model – one that would keep our existing

and increasingly bandwidth-hungry media production customers happy, attract new business and still cost in."

Asked how they got into the media arena, Justin explains: "We were in the right place, at the right time. Before we moved into our new premises in Denmark Street, W1, we shared a building in Cleveland Street, also in W1.

"The other tenants were in media production and needed to move increasingly large amounts of data around quickly. They actually approached us when they heard about our free space optics service and that side of the business started to grow from then on, mostly thanks to word of mouth."

EAD is a real business winner

"We started to explore our options with Openreach in 2010," Justin continues. "We were immediately attracted by their EAD fibre to the premises proposition. If we established our own PoPs in the capital, we would be able to use EAD at the front end of our Metropolitan Area Network (MAN)*, dramatically cut our costs and pass some of the savings to our customers.

"That's precisely what we did. Our first two PoPs went live towards the end of 2010. Keeping distances short by delivering from our own facilities gave us significant price and delivery flexibility. From the outset, we were able to offer the most competitively-priced symmetrical connections in London. That remains the case today.

"Our customer base rocketed three-fold within two months of opening those first two PoPs. Today, we have 11 PoPs in the capital and are set to establish more. Business has never been so brilliant. We've experienced a 10-fold increase in just 18 months!

"We've taken more than 100 EAD circuits to date. The vast majority are at 100Mbps. We either provide them to customers at the full speed or provide them as 10Mbps, 30Mbps or 50Mbps slices. We recently did that for several tenants in the same building, which was a first for us! The remainder of our EAD circuits are 1Gbps. Around 10 customers use the full 1Gbps and others share the bandwidth in 100Mbps slices. We also use some 1Gbps circuits for backhaul."

"From the customer perspective, EAD is future-proof in the sense that adding more bandwidth once it has been installed is a piece of cake. Think of it as having gas, electricity or water connected for the first time. Once the service is in, the customer can have as much more of it as they need, currently up to 1Gbps, although we understand that EAD may soon be capable of delivering even more bandwidth."

Openreach ticks all the right boxes

Asked about the working relationship with Openreach, Justin says: "I'd been dealing with fixed line installations of one kind or another long before we set up Venus – initially at the Independent newspaper, where I was responsible for a small network used to transmit pages for printing.

*Venus owns and operates an all-fibre MAN covering central London and the City. They use EAD to provide fibre connections between their customers' premises and their PoPs throughout the capital, which directs customer traffic back into their network and onwards to its destination.

“There’s a lot more to installing fixed lines than meets the eye, such as obtaining the required wayleaves from landlords and local authorities. So it’s vital to have a good working relationship with your preferred front-end provider. I’m delighted to report that the quality of service we get from Openreach is superb.

“They tick all the right boxes, particularly in people terms – from the planners who co-ordinate our installations, to the job control team who despatch the work and the quality of the engineers who install our circuits. Plus we get Service Level Agreements that give us the confidence of knowing that our circuits will be fixed fast in the unlikely event of a failure.

“We also benefit from direct access to Openreach ordering systems. There’s no need to get a quote, fill in orders and all the rest of that rigmarole. We arrange provisioning via their portal. It’s as straightforward as that. In-life, their circuit testing portal gives us an end-to-end view of circuit status, which is extremely useful.”

Always looking ahead

Gary Henshall, the Openreach sales executive who looks after the relationship with Venus, heaps praise on them: “They’re a savvy and visionary organisation. They think outside the box and their interests extend way beyond what we can do for their business today.

“Venus are always looking for new ways to stay ahead of the game and we’re committed to helping them do exactly that. We’re in discussions with them right now, examining how our other elements of product portfolio might further assist their ambitious growth targets.”

More reach, less hassle and far less cost

Brian Iddon, Venus Sales & Marketing Director, takes up their story: “The ubiquitous nature of the Openreach infrastructure allows us to get fibre into customer premises with the minimum of civil engineering work, associated delays and added cost.

“We can serve virtually any London business from our PoPs in the capital. In addition to businesses in the West End and City, that includes a converted mews in Richmond used by the 3D production company, a residential address in Hammersmith used as a streaming media development office and an industrial estate in Ealing.”

Fulfilling the needs of the media industry

Brian explains: “Being based in the West End, at the very heart of London’s media production industry, has enabled us to add the leading movie post-production houses to our customer base, together with many smaller animation and graphic design firms.

“As Justin pointed out earlier, these organisations generate large amounts of data and need to move it around quickly. EAD from Openreach is ideal for that. For example, high definition video cameras are now mainly tapeless. Movie and news cameramen shoot directly to disk and then upload the data directly to post-production house or broadcast facilities.

“The hospitality sector is another growth area for us. When hotels are running press and PR events, journalists and photographers naturally want to be able to upload their stories, stills and video footage

in double-quick time. Standard copper-based ADSL lines simply can’t cope with the sudden rush for bandwidth. Once again, EAD from Openreach delivers the goods.

“We’ve even had requests from news gathering companies to provide high speed links for movie premieres and other red carpet events outside cinemas in Leicester Square and other prestigious venues in the capital. Yet again, EAD installed in street furniture has the required capabilities.”

Delivering cloud-based services for SMEs and the finance sector

“We’re also winning business from an increasing number of small to medium sized enterprises with upwards of 200 employees.” Brian continues. “Many have costly and complex email servers running on site and no full-time IT personnel backup. This is clearly ridiculous, when their email service can be hosted and professionally managed in the cloud, at a fraction of the cost.

“The same goes for applications like Customer Relationship Management and Sales Force Management. Even telephony can be hosted in the cloud, which is just what the doctor ordered in the times of austerity we’re experiencing now.

“Openreach EAD is additionally winning us business from the finance sector. We don’t sell it on zero downtime, low latency and stick a high, gold-plated price tag on it. We sell EAD on its inherent merits, as a fast, ultra-reliable, low-cost service.”

Asked if he would recommend EAD to other Openreach customers, Brian said: “Absolutely. It’s a great service and the support we get from them is top-notch.”

For more information on EAD visit www.openreach.co.uk or contact your Openreach sales and relationship manager.

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