

# Case Study



## MOLE VALLEY FARMERS

South West Communications Group provides Mole Valley Farmers with a resilient, scalable network that connects all the elements of their geographically-spread business

**Mole Valley Farmers** was started in 1960 by a small group of farmers living around the South Molton area. It ran as a cooperative operating on a minimum profit margin to encourage continuity and growth in the farming community. Mole Valley Farmers operates out of eight mills and nine stores in the south west supplying a vast range of farming, gardening, home, tool and pet care goods to farmers and the public alike.

### The challenge

When South West Communications Group first became involved with them, Mole Valley Farmers had three parts to its business – its own brand of shops and mills and the Scat County Stores. It has since extended to four following the acquisition of farming merchants DI Bridgman and Sons Ltd.

The shops were communicating through a VPN network provided by NTL and the mills were linked via leased lines. The Scat stores operated through a VPN network from BT.

Mole Valley Farmers wanted to unify its communications network through one supplier. As a previous network breakdown had resulted in complete economic chaos effecting sales figures and stock control, it was essential that Mole Valley ensured that the resilience built into the new network would prevent any loss of service to any part of its organisation.

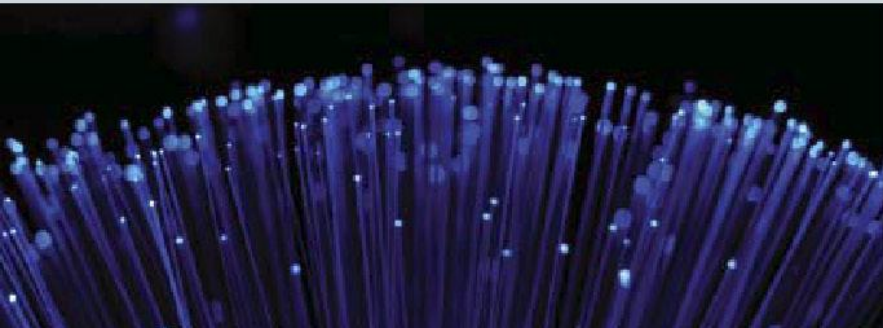
### The solution

South West Communications Group provided Mole Valley Farmers with a cohesive, highly secure and highly resilient solution which incorporated several different technologies. The resulting network terminates within South West Communications Group's Exeter based Data Centre to provide tier-1 grade security and availability.

Interconnectivity across the key sites is achieved through the following technologies:

**MPLS (Multi Protocol Label Switching)** – offers inter-site connectivity via private links into a network “cloud” that are capable of transmitting voice or data traffic from and to any connected site. This connectivity has been used between the mill sites and South West Communications Group's Data Centre in Exeter.

This stable, secure and resilient technology is critical to the Mole Valley operation because the mills run 24 hours a day, seven days a week and require constant connectivity for stock control, production and distribution.



**Leased Lines** – these direct point to point connections are used between the Mole Valley head office and South West Communications Group's Data Centre to ensure optimum connectivity at the bandwidths required.

**VPN (Virtual Private Network)** – connects the retail outlets across the group via efficient yet economical broadband connections to relay their point of sale information back to the head office. VPN connections have also been set up to allow secure connectivity between sites that traverse the Internet.

These broadband connections are business class connections with high level support agreements (see below) to ensure optimum up-time and bandwidth availability.

**Data Centre connectivity** – was the key element of this solution as it formed the main hub site. The Data Centre is directly connected to the head office, the MPLS cloud and via the Internet, to all the retail sites. As an ISP (Internet Service Provider), South West Communications Group also provides all Internet services to Mole Valley Farmers via a robust link that is scalable to suit their growing needs.

The Data Centre is directly connected to the Internet via the six major UK carriers – BT, Neos, NTL, Surf, Cable & Wireless and Kingston – with each provider being diversely routed into the Data Centre via differing exchanges thus offering resilient, fail safe connectivity to the outside world.

**Resilience** – the key to any successful network is its availability. To ensure optimum resilience, failover circuits have been installed across all the network links. These circuits have been configured to offer automatic switchover from the prime link to the failover circuit in the event of an issue, in most cases, offering a transparent service.

The MPLS links at the mills have been backed up with ADSL circuits offering VPN connectivity via the Internet, and the ISDN circuits back up the ADSL circuits at the retail sites.

**Support** – Mole Valley Farmers has the confidence that the network has been designed with a high level of resilience, providing all areas of the network with an alternative connectivity path should a failure occur.

This resilience has been backed up with a platinum service level agreement that gives Mole Valley Farmers the highest level of maintenance support. This is a total care package for mission critical accounts that need to be operational at all times, providing on-site support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. If engineers are unable to fix the problem remotely, a skilled field engineer will attend the site within four hours.

#### The result

South West Communications Group provided Mole Valley with a single network connecting all elements of their business with complete security and reliability built in.

With South West Communications Group offering a single point of contact for all their network needs and taking ownership of all service-related issues, Mole Valley Farmers now have freedom from the management of multiple suppliers and fault rectification.

South West Communications Group's expertise within the data environment has helped Mole Valley Farmers to communicate more effectively and reliably between their geographically-spread locations, with the knowledge that the resilient network is scalable to expand as their business continues to grow.

#### Future development

Building on the now established supplier relationship, Mole Valley Farmers are currently discussing how best to protect their data by utilising the services and facilities offered by the South West Communications Group Data Centre.