

The British Museum

The British Museum has installed a sophisticated network infrastructure to modernise its IT operations and provide the foundation for future applications. Pinacl Solutions designed and installed the infrastructure and will provide management capabilities under the terms of a 5 year contract.



basis. Similarly, visitors use electronic services to plan their visits and to find out more about the Museum and its collections. Graham Head, Head of Information Systems comments, "Technology helps us to engage our audience in our exhibits and collections. This makes our staff's job easier as our visitors have quicker and more readily available information at their fingertips." The museum also relies on the IT infrastructure to deliver traditional back of house tools such as email and making multimedia technologies available to the public that showcase the museum's collections. Other services include retail and catering EPOS systems. Graham explains, "There is a definite need to keep up with new technology in an establishment such as the British Museum. "Museums can't exist in isolation. We need to make additional information available to staff and visitors on a global basis. Today's visitors expect to be able to access information about our exhibits and exhibitions prior to their visit and once they are there, these technologies will only serve to enhance their visit."

Time to update

The museum's initial concern was that it was using legacy technology and it wasn't going to be supported for much longer. It also needed to extend the network and reduce management costs and have a platform that would be able to support portable devices and other wireless technologies. It was Graham himself who made the decision to update the infrastructure. He says, "Our immediate requirements were for unified technology with a single point of management. We also needed a network that we could extend rapidly as required."

Finding a supplier

Pinacl was awarded a five year contract with the museum for the supply and support of its IT system. Ele Gumbs, Business Development Manager for Pinacl Solutions, explains, "This agreement will

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The Museum was first housed in a 17th century mansion, Montague House, in Bloomsbury on the site of today's building. On 15th January, 1759 the British Museum opened to the public and with the exception of two World Wars, when parts of the collection were evacuated, it has remained open ever since. The museum has gone from an attendance of around 5,000 a year to today's five million.

Engaging the audience

In order to accommodate the growing range of electronic visitor, educational and staff services it offers, the British Museum decided it was time to re-evaluate its requirements. Most of the staff work and collaborate electronically on an international

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allow us to work with the museum at a strategic development level, taking care of all the museum's IT requirements and to help the museum take advantage of new and emerging technologies."

Grand designs

Pinacl designed a completely new infrastructure on behalf of the museum with the initial design phase taking three weeks. The overall procurement process, including the implementation of a number of design changes, took eight months. New equipment was installed throughout the museum including the new computer room and at a variety of cabinet locations throughout the building. The existing network infrastructure consisted of a 3Com asynchronous transfer mode network connected to a Cisco gigabit front of house network. Although there was this existing infrastructure in place, it was not necessary to remove it. Instead, Pinacl added to it and relocated parts of it around the museum. Additional links were also being added in order to facilitate the furthest corners of the museum. Pinacl aims to work with the museum on a strategic level. Ele explains, "We have run a series of workshops and strategy days to assess the museum's future requirements. This is an ongoing process. We are also beta testing a variety of products such as PDAs and wireless technologies on behalf of the museum to evaluate their use to the museum in the future."

Working under restriction

As with any old building, there are a number of restrictions regarding any work that goes on. Ele explains, "Many of the buildings that make up the British Museum are listed. We therefore needed to comply with the museum's installation regulations." The main restrictions that affected Pinacl were that the company was not allowed to interfere with any architectural mouldings, wood or plaster and was not allowed to drill holes over 25mm without permission. In addition, if Pinacl was installing cables via a secure area, there needed to be a guard in attendance. Pinacl installed Category 6, fibre and voice backbone in the East Residence and this newly installed cable allows for data to be transferred at a higher rate. The work took place on a phase by phase basis, rather than all at once, in order to ensure minimum disruption to the general day to day running of the museum. Graham comments, "We were extremely pleased with the way things went and the general running of the museum took place as normal."

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Graham Head, Head of Information Systems for the British Museum

Central control

Pinacl also helped the museum to prepare for the centralising of the museum's IT and admin staff to one area. In the future, the museum will be welcoming the IT and admin staff from the Museum of London and Museum of Mankind which will also be working out of the British Museum. The company is also supplying network cabling to touch screen interactive information points in the 'Wellcome Gallery.' There are currently employees from Pinacl Solutions permanently onsite working on this project. The company is working very closely with the museum to discuss new ideas and pilot new kit. Ele comments, "We are also constantly trialing new technologies so that the museum has access to the very latest technologies that may be used to attract new visitors to the museum." Working with Pinacl Solutions, the British Museum can manage its IT infrastructure from one central location and reduce the overall cost of ownership. Graham says, "The new architecture is able to handle a far greater volume of traffic, giving us a sound and flexible platform for possible future developments such as PDA technology, voice and data convergence and wireless networking. We hope to make use of these new and emerging technologies to deliver innovative services to our staff and visitors in the future."

IN FOCUS:

- Working together with the museum at a strategic development level, to deliver all the museum's IT requirements.
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