IBM

IBM Network Station blends well with Steelcase Strafor's designs.

As the world's leading manufacturer of quality office furniture, France-based Steelcase Strafor is constantly developing products that enhance the office environment by matching advanced function with advanced design. Now, the company is adopting this same principle for its IT infrastructure. It's using the IBM Network Station™ network computer to give users easy access to numerous applications residing on different platforms throughout the company … and eliminating a jumble of outdated terminals, PCs, and network technology.

According to John Sanford, IT manager of Steelcase Strafor's UK operations, "We originally were using DEC equipment and custom software in the UK, but when Strafor bought us, we had to accommodate many other systems, as well."

Today, the UK operation needs access to a mainframe-based e-mail system located in Strasbourg; a remote sales order processing system — currently running on a mainframe, but being transitioned to SAP on an SP2® processor; several DEC hosts; an IBM RS/6000™ that runs the company's manufacturing systems; and an IBM AS/400®, which runs HR and payroll applications.

Access to everything

Because of these varied access requirements, many offices had both a dumb terminal and a PC on one desk, Sanford says. "We needed to get rid of the terminals, and with the Network Station I tidied that up in one go. The Network Station's built-in terminal emulation capabilities handle the tasks that used to be performed on dumb terminals, and users can have their PC productivity applications through NT servers running WinCenter Pro, a software program that lets thin-clients access Windows® in a multiuser environment."

In its initial roll-out, Steelcase Strafor installed approximately 70 IBM Network
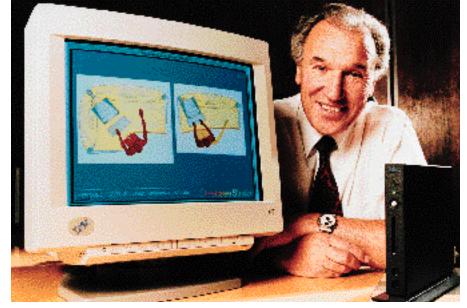
Application	Upgrading complex host-terminal and network infrastructure to simpler thin client/LAN environment
Hardware	IBM Network Station, IBM RS/6000, IBM AS/400, IBM S/390, DEC and NT servers
Software	Custom manufacturing application, SAP, e-mail, Lotus Notes, PC productivity applications

John Sanford, IT manager at Steelcase Strafor, finds the IBM Network Station gives his company the best of PCs and terminals.

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Station Series 100 network computers at its manufacturing sites in Kent, South Wales and the Midlands, replacing older VT100 terminals. It also installed several Series 100s in its Head Office that boot from a new IBM RS/6000 server. In addition, the company has installed several Network Stations in its London showroom, booting off a PC server, so that travelling representatives can access their desktop applications.

Because the Network Station is designed to access applications on practically any server, it gives Steelcase Strafor users access not only to the IBM servers, but also to NetWare® and UNIX®-based servers throughout the company.

Simplifying the environment
"Since we installed the Network Station, all our 3270 terminals are gone. We have just three 5250 terminals and no more DEC screens," Sanford says. "We've even reduced the number of desktop PCs. The Network Station has greatly reduced our desktop inventory and enabled us to create a more uniform and manageable environment." The Network Station also helped Steelcase Strafor move from an antiquated Gandalf hub-based WAN to a LAN-based structure using Cisco routers.

Sanford raves about the improvements the Network Station has brought to his organization. Before, users complained about slow performance, poor connectivity, and inadequate terminal emulation that didn't support all the function keys they needed for e-mail.

"Users love their Network Stations," Sanford says. "In one stroke, they got color displays, increased application and network performance, access to Windows applications, and emulators that support all their familiar function keys."

Hardware savings are just the start
While Sanford says the Network Stations cost less to buy than PCs, he notes that hardware costs are not the whole

equation. "There's also a significant software cost. Each PC we installed needed Windows 3.1 and LWPDOS (or Windows 95), Attachmate, terminal emulation software, a virus checker, and a variety of applications," he says.

The PCs are also far more expensive and time-consuming to keep running, placing large demands on a relatively small IT support team. In contrast, the Network Station is very easy to manage and comes with all the necessary terminal emulation built in.

"The Network Station is very reliable, it protects us from virus risks and illegally installed software, and we can set up and configure a new user with an NC in about ten minutes. That same operation would take us at least a half day with no interruptions on a PC — but more likely a whole day, since there are always interruptions," Sanford says.

Admitting his hesitation about being an early adopter of network computers, Sanford says that when he looked at the future and weighed his options, he decided he simply had to "bite the bullet." And he's glad he did. Sanford is now considering moving up from the Network Station Series 100 to the Series 300 — the model that IBM has optimized for Internet use — to access Lotus Notes® on the RS/6000 through a browser. It's part of a project that would use Notes to store the documentation for Steelcase Strafor's manufacturing application, so that users can get self-service help via the intranet.

Sanford says: "Our main objective is to give our users access to all corporate software in a comfortable and professional IT environment, and the IBM Network Station makes it all possible."

Steelcase Strafor is a joint venture between Steelcase, Inc. (USA) and Strafor Facom (France). The company has offices and manufacturing facilities throughout Europe. In the UK, the company possesses the Royal Warrant of Appointment from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.

For more information
To find out more about how network computing with the IBM Network Station and the IBM family of servers can help you make the most of your business opportunities, call 1 800 IBM-7080, in North America. Outside North America, call 416 383-5152. If you have access to the Internet, you can find additional information via the World Wide Web at *www.ibm.com/nc.*

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