

CASE STUDY

AXMINSTER TOOLS & MACHINERY

A long-term strategic partnership with Axminster Tools & Machinery sees the deployment of an extensive, cohesive and collaborative single solution that includes a hosted telephone system as part of an ever-expanding wide area network (WAN) with our data centre at its core.

Axminster Tools & Machinery Centre is a family-run business based in Devon. It is a market leader in the mail order tools and machinery industry selling its 15,000-plus products to trade professionals and amateur DIY and hobby enthusiasts.

Since Axminster was founded in 1972, they have grown by expanding their product range, entering new geographical markets and establishing new customers while maintaining core values of high levels of customer service and satisfaction. Aggressive growth plans meant Axminster needed a **long-term IT and communications partner** to develop and support the infrastructure on which the business operates.

South West Communications Group first supplied Axminster with a new telephone system in 1992. When they outgrew this, Axminster looked to the marketplace seeking a combined voice and data network from a single communications company that would link its head office and retail sites as a single business.

Calls to the business had increased dramatically following the introduction of its mail order service and calls to customer and staff mobile phones had become an expensive outlay.

Again, Axminster selected us – also a company that had grown with time – to deploy an Alcatel-Lucent OmniPCX Enterprise system, hosted in our data centre, together with an OmniTouch Contact

AXMINSTER Tools & Machinery

This not only met the needs of Axminster's warehouse facility and new-build headquarters, including a manufacturing division, a photography studio and a skills training centre, it also had the flexibility to link to and accommodate the opening of seven stores in Axminster, Cardiff, High Wycombe, Newcastle, Nuneaton, Sittingbourne and Warrington.

IP telephony was deployed for **300+ extensions** with the installation of the Alcatel-Lucent OmniPCX Enterprise onto the data network, designed to support voice and data traffic.

Embracing VoIP means Axminster has more control over any moves or changes to the system. IP handsets can be simply unplugged and plugged in elsewhere reducing the need to call out any third-party engineers.

Contact centre software for 40 agents enables them to **cope with the 2,500 calls received each day** from their vast customer base, including mail orders, product questions and technical queries.

Axminster uses the contact centre software to provide skills-based routing options to direct callers to the most appropriate agent. Real-time visual updates on the number of calls waiting, calls answered, available agents and an array of vital call handling statistic can be clearly viewed on a plasma screen wallboard.

Contact centre supervisors have been equipped with a management package that allows them to respond to their increased call volumes by managing call queues, agent groups and announcement messages.

Detailed historical call reporting also allows them to monitor calls received and response times, so they can manage staff and shift numbers accordingly.

Alcatel-Lucent 
Enterprise

 Meraki

A WAN was originally implemented using traditional low capacity leased lines circuits to connect the headquarters to its retail site in Axminster and to our data centre in Exeter. It has since been upgraded under our guidance to **high bandwidth ethernet private circuits** and gives Axminster's sites access to their central business systems, such as stock control and credit card verification.

The link to the data centre also provides Axminster with business class internet services, which are not always available in small market towns. Our resilient, scalable bandwidth is capable of coping with their online e-commerce catalogue, YouTube product videos and tutorials, the upload of large image files from their photography studio and providing staff internet access.

Underpinned by a Cisco Meraki iWAN solution, this network has been extended to encompass the seven stores, with **our data centre being the central hub** that links them to the rest of Axminster's WAN, to give them access to all of the company's business systems.

Connectivity at the stores varies from ethernet over fibre to the cabinet (EoFTTC), ethernet in the first mile (EFM) and internet leased lines, but the Meraki solution manages all these internet-facing circuits with overlaying secure VPN and assured PCI compliance.

Our data centre hosts the core of this Meraki iWAN with a 1Gbps private circuit connecting to Axminster's headquarters as well as providing 100Mbps of resilient internet breakout and security & web content filtering,

protected by an assured service level agreement and plenty of capacity for current and future requirements. Wi-Fi was deployed throughout the warehouses with an Alcatel-Lucent OmniAccess wireless network to enable staff to use handheld scanners to keep track of products and customer orders as they pass through the automated mail order distribution process.

Within the stores, Cisco Meraki Wi-Fi has been installed to provide guest access that **provides social media authentication**. This gives the marketing team the ability to target these customers, as well as reporting on repeat visits and in-store behaviour.

Remote working was accommodated with the provision of virtual private network (VPN) broadband connections for members of staff who work from home, sales representatives and Axminster's buyers who operate in the Far East.

SIP trunks were trialled at the Nuneaton and Warrington stores as a cost-effective means of providing telephony services. With the WAN upgrade, Axminster has moved to SIP for all of their services with 80+ channels, reduced line rentals and inclusive mobile and landline minutes equating to a **saving of £12,000 per year**.

The migration to SIP did not mean they had to change their numbers so they could retain their local presence. However, should any of the stores experience unexpected high call volumes, these calls can overflow across the network and be handled by the customer service agents at head office.

We also provided Axminster with a number of non-geographic 0300 number for its mail order department to give them a **national identity and low-cost calls** for its customers from both mobiles and landlines.

Axminster has also benefited from many years of high level customer service and support, with the same account manager for 16 years who has proactively sought out solutions that will improve business operations and create cost savings. By doing so, **swcomms** has become an extension to the in-house IT department through its provision of specialist skills and expertise.

"We have worked with swcomms for many years and during this time Axminster Tools & Machinery has enjoyed an excellent and professional working relationship. It is an absolute pleasure to work with any member of staff, from the account and projects managers to the engineers and technicians – nothing is too much trouble.

"We are very pleased with the service provided and look forward to working with them on future projects."

Damion Norcombe, IT manager