

Interview with Joe Sales, director of DirectTTN.

WITSIMIT (WS): Hi Joe. Thanks for coming in. How can we help you?

Joe Sales (JS): We are interested in expanding our online sales activities through the internet. Currently we have a small site which is hosted by our ISP, but the costs and limitations and management of this site have become a problem for us. We currently have an 8 Meg ADSL connection to our office and we would like to have our own server to run our internet site.

WS: You do know that there are a lot of expenses associated with owning your own server?

JS: Yes. We have spoken about it extensively. I did my business degree with an IT major, but we never did a lot of prac. Most of my work was with project management and business systems. Not a lot of hands on. But, we have an employee that is a unix buff. He is keen to move over into the IT management side if this goes ahead. But all the advice we have been given is that most of the work in a project such as this is in the initial design and configuration. Once the server is up and running, we would simply have to keep our website updates, which we have to do now any way.

WS: Well, it may not be quite that simple. There will also be the management of the server itself, monitoring logs as well as maintaining both the user and security environment.

JS: Well, I guess that if we have problems, we will solve them as they occur. We are committed to going in this direction. Any costs that arise from our support needs will be offset by the savings in hosting fees.

WS: OK then, just how big is this site?

JS: The current site is approximately 2 GB in size. Our information logs would indicate that we have over 2500 visits in a day with around 10% of those visits resulting in sales. Our main issue is that our catalogue of items for sale is over 25000. It takes a lot of time to be constantly update prices, amounts and associated graphics etc. While we have software that assists us, the management of that level of data on a hosted site is a pain. By having the server local to us, there will be a significant cost and time reduction in the management side of the site.

WS: Is this volume likely to change?

JS: Well, we always hope we have more customers, but the number of sale items have been growing by 50% every year for the last 4 years. Maybe that will start to slow down as we have a lot of items online now, but who knows?

WS: So what is in your current network?

JS: We currently have 8 employees, each of whom have PC. All the network devices are linked to each other through a switch.

WS: What switch?

JS: A 'black and gold' thing – you know the cheap brand and model. It works OK. You just plug it in and it works. We are big on that in this business. All our PCS are leased so they are swapped out and replaced every 2 years. We have a NAS server

that holds our data, but that's about it. It mostly manages itself as well. RAID, automated backup with a UPS. It's a good little unit. Our two colour printers are network models so that all stuff manages its self mostly.

WS: Do you know what speed your network runs at?

JS: Not sure, but all the network cards in the new PCs are 10/100 MB ones. The Cable guys installed the cable to 'cat5e', what ever that means. They charged us enough, so it better be good.

WS: How does the internet link in?

JS: We have a Netcom 4 port router that we plugged in, ran the ISP install disk and it worked. It seems to be OK, but I don't think its too complex, if you know what I mean. That may have to be replaced if the site needs a better gateway.

WS: Do you have a leased ip address range?

JS: Not sure what that is, so I guess not. We just signed up for our ADSL package, and it works well.

WS: So, you want us to design a server to run your internet site, build it and delivery it to you? Is that right?

JS: Pretty much. We want it to work when we plug it in and to be able to manage our site locally. So what we want to do is to be able to develop our website on a development PC we are already using (running Personal Webserver I think) and then upload the tested files to the live webserver. If there is any maintenance stuff for our IT guy to do, you will need to provide some handover documentation and train him in managing the server. So if there are any remote admin configurations to be built into the server, you will have to configure them. We want it to work when it arrives.

WS: You do realise that just the server will not be enough? We will have to make changes to your network to accommodate this server. You just can't plug it in and it will work. It doesn't work like that for an internet web server.

JS: Well, our other computers work like that.

WS: Unfortunately, servers don't. We will most likely need to install some new network gear. A new router with some decent firewall software, perhaps a better switch to keep your local network secure from the internet. You will also need to lease some IP addresses from your ISP. Is that OK?

JS: As long as it all works. But remember, this site is our business and we can't afford to shut down while you do the work. Our existing systems will need to keep working up until the new systems come online. Even if they are slow and frustrating, they are much better than nothing. So how do you suggest that we go about this? Do you know what it will cost?

WS: Well, first of all we need to get a proposal to you.

JS: A project proposal – yea we did lots of them at uni.

WS: It's important that you know what we are proposing to do to your network. The project proposal will have an overview of what we have discussed here and a description of what we need to do to get it to work. It will list the hardware we need,

the time that we estimate it will take to design, install and test it. It will also take some time to install it into your network and make sure its right.

JS: Don't forget, our network can't go down. We must keep the hosted site running until the new server is going.

WS: That shouldn't be a problem. We will also need to budget time to train your IT guy in the support of this server. Then we can estimate the cost.

JS: I need to know how you propose to implement this system without causing us any downtime.

WS: That will all be in the project proposal. You do know that there will be charges for the proposal design if you decide not proceed?

JS: That's fine. This is a major step for us and we need to get it right. So do you need any more info?

WS: Not really. Most likely we will leave your existing network largely untouched and add the site to the same network level as your router. That way you have all the speed advantages of it being on your network, with the security benefits of having it hosted by another network.

JS: Sounds great. Can't wait.

END OF MEETING.