

# CASE STUDY

## Bobbing along nicely

**Correct Solutions floats a 3G solution to a ship management company to help improve its ship-to-shore communications. ROB IRWIN reports.**

Resellers sometimes find themselves in pretty odd places installing new pieces of kit. Outfitting a network and 3G Internet access to a fleet of ships, however, would probably take the prize in any bar room bragging competition.

But that's exactly what Sydney reseller, Correct Solutions, was tasked with doing earlier this year. Having supplied networking services to Inco Ships offices for two years, it was naturally the ship management company's first port of call for upgrading its ship-to-shore communications on-board its fleet of 12 vessels.

"Essentially, we wanted to achieve a reliable ship-to-shore communications system over the Internet, rather than using satellite which can be quite expensive," Inco Ships chartering manager, Lindsay Harvey, said. "Trying to do it with a combination of a CDMA platform and satellite was reasonable – but not as reliable as we would have liked."

Inco Ships liaised with Correct Solutions on its requirements. They included upgrading software and provisioning new workstations on-board the ships. It provided the MV Stadacona, owned by CSL Australia, to serve as a test bed before rolling out the new technology across another 11 ships.

### Perfect fit

"Inco Ships basically needed three things in its fleet: it needed an upgrade of its ship management software, AMOS, to a new piece of software called ABS; Internet communications that didn't rely on satellite; and the ability for us to manage the network remotely via that Internet connection," Correct Solutions managing director, Ryan Spillane, explained.

The reseller found the perfect fit for the software upgrade and remote access issues in an IBM xSeries 206 server running Microsoft Small Business Server 2003 Premium Edition. This was connected to six IBM ThinkCentre workstations.

It addressed Internet connectivity by installing a Telstra Next-G sim card into Ericsson W-20 routers. Sailors on the Stadacona will have full Internet access when it is within range of the Next-G network. When out of range, the ship will revert to its former satellite service as a failover.

Installation of the hardware and software was done over two sessions with a three-week gap whenever the Stadacona was docked in Whyalla, South Australia. Spillane estimated the job took about 1.5 days, with some additional work undertaken remotely.

The total solution is now being trialled while the ship is at sea, and first impressions are favourable, leading to the company to start planning the rest of its fleet upgrade, he said.

"Most of the ships in the fleet are of a similar size to the Stadacona, with some larger and some smaller," he said. "All of them will have a server, but on some ships there might be



Inco Ships' Lindsay Harvey

eight or nine PCs attached to it, while other ships only have two or three attached. The majority will have five or six."

While working at sea isn't too dissimilar to working on the land, there were also some additional occupational health and safety issues that the reseller had to be aware of, Spillane said.

"When the ship's out to sea, you sometimes have to go out in a small boat and climb up a ladder on the side," he said. "So it's a little different to normal."

The installation on the Stadacona worked out around \$10,000 for the ABS software license, \$18,000 for the server and six workstations, \$1100 for the Ericsson router and \$4000 in professional fees. Although a return on investment wasn't as easily quantifiable in dollars, Spillane said there were real benefits in staff productivity.

### Remote access

"With Correct Solutions having remote access to keep the machines running, we will also keep the head office costs down as we won't need to employ as many people," he said.

Prior to getting remote access installed on the ship, any updates to the ship's software were mailed via CD-ROM. This could result in a delay of days to weeks from when the upgrade was available, to when it would be installed.

When these could include vital security updates, having more immediate methods of upgrading via remote access are clear.

"Small Business Server is really good because we can use it to lock down the workstations at certain times of the day, or from viewing certain websites," Spillane said. "We can also give different levels of access to different ranks on the ship."

Harvey said that with a dozen ships in the Inco Ships fleet, Correct Solutions would have its work cut out for it over the next six months as it added a server, PCs and 3G Internet access.

"If you were doing it in an office, it would only take a matter of weeks, but when ships are moving around all the time and going to remote ports, it's not as easy," he said.