

Hilson Moran

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Hilson Moran increases agility - improving network efficiency by up to 80% and strengthening data security

Hilson Moran is a multi-disciplinary engineering consultancy with offices in the UK and Middle East. The business plans, designs, manages and operates built assets for a range of customers. It employs more than 250 people across five offices in the UK and Middle East.

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Lee Beckford
Head of IT, Hilson Moran

Challenge: Always-on access to applications

Hilson Moran’s portfolio of work includes some of the most prestigious projects in the hottest construction markets. These include the provision of building services for the 2012 Olympic Village in London, 30 St Mary Axe (The Gherkin), 20 Fenchurch Street (The Walkie Talkie), and the masterplan to a community of 50,000 residents off the coast of Abu Dhabi.

“The business needs IT to deliver the solutions that allow our engineers to do their job effectively,” says Lee Beckford, Hilson Moran’s Head of IT. “My priority is to safeguard our data. To keep it safe and to keep it accessible.”

Beckford has a 10-year plan to transform Hilson Moran’s approach to IT. The plan is in three stages, with the ultimate goal of moving everything to the cloud. “This first step is to centralize our IT infrastructure at the London office,” he says. “We want zero-branch IT.”

In Brief

Challenges

- Enable the business to centralize IT infrastructure, data and IT operations to the London head office to ensure more robust data security and reduce high cost of providing IT services to Middle East offices
- Improve network performance
- Reduce support strain on IT team

Solution

- Riverbed® SteelFusion™ to centralize remote IT operations, simplify management, and improve data security and backups
- Riverbed® SteelHead™ and Riverbed® SteelHead™ Mobile for optimized WAN performance and application acceleration to remote and mobile workers

Benefits

- Improved network efficiency by as much as 80%
- Strengthened data security at a fraction of the estimated budget
- Reduced strain on IT team with improved branch support, freeing time to support new projects
- Encouraged greater collaboration and remote working

“Even in locations with thin broadband, SteelHead Mobile allows staff to access the files they need. Any actions made on site or with a client can then be actioned back in the office. Centralization enabled by SteelFusion means we’re all working off the latest files.”

Roger Waters-Duke
CFO, Hilson Moran

Centralization would allow Beckford to refresh hardware, address support issues – particularly to remote offices - and improve the back-up and restoration of data: “We need to optimize support to branch offices. Qatar and UAE, for instance, have a Sunday-Thursday working week, and it is essential we can fix issues from the UK on a Sunday. Also, data back-ups were not being done as rigorously as required.”

For centralization to work, Beckford needed maximum efficiency from the Hilson Moran network. “We want staff to be highly mobile and to be able to work from anywhere. We need the network to support collaboration, for colleagues to be able to send and access large CAD files wherever, whenever.”

Solution: The ideal opportunity to optimize

“I’ve always been aware of Riverbed Technology’s WAN optimization capabilities,” says Beckford. “This project was my first opportunity to use them.”

The opening of a new Hilson Moran office in Qatar focused attentions on a deadline. “I knew I didn’t want to put server hardware in there, hardware we’d struggle to support and end up needing to replace in three years,” says Beckford. “I wanted us future-proofed.”

In each remote office location Hilson Moran deployed Riverbed SteelFusion, a software-defined edge solution that delivers unprecedented data security, business continuity, IT agility and end-user productivity to distributed enterprises. SteelFusion enabled IT to be removed from remote offices, converging the edge infrastructure to the main data center.

All back-ups are now completed via the London office, and centralizing services to the UK has enabled more operational control, reduced complexity and improved data security.

Integrated with SteelFusion, Riverbed SteelHead optimizes the WAN, accelerates application delivery, and reduces bandwidth use. In addition, Riverbed SteelHead Mobile extends optimization for staff working outside the office to ensure they can be equally productive, regardless of location.

With the new appliances commissioned in advance, the installation was completed in days. “It was effectively plug-and-play, and the user-interface is very intuitive,” says Beckford. “We went up to the Manchester office to oversee the original install, but we could manage Abu Dhabi and Doha by using a local team on a video conference to Farnborough; it was that straightforward.

“We could see the optimization taking place, file by file. The new Middle East servers were up and running within minutes.”

Riverbed also helped address Hilson Moran’s concerns around support in the Middle East. “Because of the critical nature of our work, I made it clear we needed rock-solid support. No support solution, no contract,” says Beckford. “Riverbed helped address this by introducing Zycko to work with us on the installation and ongoing support in the Middle East.”

Benefits: Cost, culture and morale

SteelFusion allows Hilson Moran to virtualize remote physical servers into the main data center. All remote data and applications are now controlled centrally, meaning branch IT can be scaled up and down when needed, without the need for remote IT staff. And all of this is accomplished while optimizing application performance for users at each site.

“Thanks to the Riverbed solution, stage one of our 10-year plan is now complete,” says Beckford. “With Riverbed SteelFusion, Hilson Moran’s IT infrastructure is now centralized at the London head office. The Riverbed solution has positively impacted cost, culture and morale.”

“In terms of network efficiency, we were paying £250,000 (\$310,400) for a 5mb line into the Qatar office – around the same price as the 100mb we need for the whole of the UK,” he says. “It’s early days, but it looks like we’re only using 20% of our bandwidth.”

“We have a fantastic relationship with Riverbed. It doesn’t feel like a working relationship, it has been a partnership. The Riverbed team has shown an interest in what we’re trying to achieve overall, and at every stage, they’ve looked to help. It was the first time a third party had delivered what they had promised, on time, to budget and ahead of expectations.”

Lee Beckford
Head of IT, Hilson Moran

With a zero-branch IT set-up, energy and air conditioning costs will also be lower. The Manchester office is due to relocate in 2017, when there will be less floor space needed for IT, freeing more space for client services. This also leads to savings on procuring, supporting and maintaining branch IT. In the future, new branch set up can be smaller, and IT will be quicker to provision.

“As a business, we’re now even more secure, more agile and more flexible,” Beckford states. “Riverbed enables us to backup between sites, using a couple of Network Attached Storage boxes. We’d budgeted £60,000 (\$74,500) for backup and we’re probably only spending £5,000 (\$6,200).

Data security is critical, he adds: “Many of the tenders we’re going for require us to have a robust approach to security - for example, Building Information Modelling level 2, where it’s unacceptable for files to be stored locally on a laptop.”

Now, Hilson Moran employees can send and access files held centrally. “Staff can work out of the office, on site, with a client. We can move data faster, and with more resilience,” says Hilson Moran CFO Roger Waters-Duke.

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This immediately improves client work – and Hilson Moran’s ability to bring the right specialists into projects, when they’re needed. “We have core skills, but it may be that we need to bring in specialists in acoustics or fire protection or vertical transport,” says Beckford. “It is far easier to collaborate, and create flexible project teams, with a strong network. We can be more agile in the way we address projects.”

Essentially, Hilson Moran applications now perform better. SteelFusion centralizes all of the company data, while eliminating infrastructure dependencies at remote sites, and still delivering optimal application performance for users wherever they may be in the world.

For instance, the Riverbed solution optimizes traffic from the Microsoft Exchange servers. For end users, this means when they open their email, messages are displayed quickly, rather than taking a long time to download which improves productivity.

Finance, security and application performance aside, Beckford says the biggest impact has been among the IT team. “The engagement with Riverbed and support from Zycko means we are better able to support the Middle East offices and other users, which has freed up a huge amount of time.

“We’re better able to support the business on new projects – and commit to delivery deadlines. In particular, we have the time to figure out the business benefit of any IT project. There is no point implementing something that doesn’t benefit our business.”

This last point is key to Beckford’s long-term strategy. Implementing the combination of SteelHead and SteelFusion has produced clear business benefits; in addition, it has demonstrated to the Hilson Moran board that the IT team can deliver a major IT project on time and to budget. This makes it easier to make the case for further investment.

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“We’re looking at more remote working, device refreshes, becoming a paperless office and greater use of the cloud,” says Beckford. “The successful completion of stage one of our 10-year strategy, with the support of Riverbed, gives us a platform on which to build.”

About Riverbed

Riverbed enables organizations to modernize their networks and applications with industry-leading SD-WAN, application acceleration, and visibility solutions. Riverbed’s platform allows enterprises to transform application and cloud performance into a competitive advantage by maximizing employee productivity and leveraging IT to create new forms of operational agility. At more than \$1 billion in annual revenue, Riverbed’s 28,000+ customers include 97% of the Fortune 100 and 98% of the Forbes Global 100. Learn more at www.riverbed.com. riverbed.com

The Riverbed logo consists of the word "riverbed" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters "river" are in a dark blue color, and the letters "bed" are in a bright orange color.