

Team Netsol/ Chelsea Financial Services



Sun Ray™ Desktop Solution Success Story

Key highlights

Company

Chelsea Financial Services plc

Industry

- Financial Services

Applications

- Java™ technology-based database entry and management systems
- Financial investment systems to manage clients and client investments, client records, customer mailings, reports, and FSA compliance
- StarOffice™ Office Suite

Hardware/Software

- 2 Sun™ Netra™ t1 servers
- 20 Sun Ray™ ultra-thin clients
- Sun Solaris™ Operating System
- Oracle8i database

Key Business Results

- Provides a highly robust, easy-to-use solution that requires no system administration at the customer site
- Significantly faster and more responsive than the previous system
- Performance, reliability, scalability, and low-maintenance were key factors in choosing Sun's ultra-thin client solution
- Zero system downtime (no reboots) since system went live
- Team Netsol provides centralized application service provider (ASP) services and system management from its base in Manchester, England

"We initially chose Sun for its proven security, reliability, scalability, and robustness over and above other platforms, and we have not been disappointed. There's no need for day-to-day maintenance on the system — it just runs and runs. In fact, it has not had to be rebooted since we installed it, which means there's been zero system downtime since going live!"

– Ged Clarke, Technical Director, Team Netsol

Chelsea Financial Services PLC provides discounted execution-only dealing of personal investment funds, including ISAs, PEP transfers, Unit Trusts, and Bonds. Thanks to a tenfold increase in its client base over the past 7 years, the company now ranks as the second largest independent discount broker within the UK.

Dealing with over 150,000 customers and more than 200,000 investments, however, was putting a strain on Chelsea's 7-year-old, back-office administration system, which was no longer robust or responsive enough to meet Chelsea's increased business and customer needs. It was time to invest in a new solution that could accommodate both current and future growth requirements, while reinforcing Chelsea's competitive advantage.

The deployment and support of Chelsea's original system was led by Ged Clarke, Technical Director, Team Netsol — a specialist technology company with expertise in Java™, UNIX®, XML, and application server technology and thin client computing. Chelsea has always chosen to focus on its core activities and has brought in IT expertise from specialists such as Team Netsol. Over the years, the two companies have always worked very closely together, so Team Netsol was a natural choice for specifying and supplying the new solution.

"Chelsea wanted a state-of-the-art system, with the flexibility to support increased user workloads during the peak season for financial services but without the need for in-house expertise or administration," explains Ged Clarke. "Our recommendation was a ultra-thin client computer solution, whereby the applications are hosted on a central server and accessed by users via desktop terminals. This greatly reduces system administration costs, while improving system manageability. We would host the system for Chelsea, on an ASP basis, leaving the company free to concentrate on its core financial services competencies."

“We’ve been so impressed with the technology and the flexibility of the Sun Ray that we are now recommending and implementing them on a regular basis. We definitely see a bright future together.”

– Ged Clarke, Technical Director, Team Netsol

“Around the time that we were researching the new system for Chelsea, Sun Microsystems introduced the Sun Ray™ desktop solution,” Ged Clarke continues. “Although we had been considering an alternative product, we took a look at Sun Ray systems — and were very impressed. The concept is wonderfully simple. The Sun Ray ultra-thin client sits on the desktop and only processes keyboard input and screen output, leaving all of the application processing and storage to the server. The Sun Ray ultra-thin clients are accessed with smart cards, enabling a hot-desk environment so that users can go to any desk, insert their card, and log onto the system as if they were using their own personal terminal. This offers superb benefits for accommodating additional users when workloads increase.”

Having recommended the Sun Ray solution to Chelsea, Team Netsol was duly engaged to design, build, deploy, and maintain the new administration system. The system infrastructure comprises a Sun™ Netra™ t1 Sun Ray server, 20 Sun Ray ultra-thin clients, and a Netra t1 Oracle database and application server, all running on the Solaris™ Operating System.

In addition to developing the platform, Team Netsol wrote a process-driven, object-oriented, Java™ technology-based database entry and management system for an Oracle®i database. This provides fast, easy access to a wide range of financial investment applications to manage clients and client investments, client records, customer mailings, reports, and FSA compliance.

Employing the latest Java techniques also provides an upgrade path, with the ability to expand to emerging XML and messaging technologies as they become more widely used within the financial services sector. For traditional office applications, Team Netsol installed the StarOffice™ Office Suite, providing full office functionality at a fraction of the cost of other packages.

As Ged Clarke explains, Chelsea’s server is managed and maintained by Team Netsol on a remote basis: “We have an exact replica of Chelsea’s server at our site in Manchester, from where we provide complete, remote application support and ongoing development — which has many powerful benefits for Chelsea. For example, software is only updated once at a single point, avoiding the need to attend to every desktop individually and eliminating the need for in-house specialist administration on site at Chelsea, thus, significantly reducing the total cost of ownership.”

“Another advantage is that no data is stored on a Sun Ray, so, in the unlikely event of a hardware failure, the device can be swapped out and the user’s desktop will reappear in exactly the same state as before the failure occurred. And smart card security allows users to roam from desk to desk and still have their current work session to hand.”

“The resilience of the Sun servers ensures maximum uptime, which is vital to the running of the business. And the system requires so little support that we’ve now reached the stage where the only technical support we provide is helping with complicated SQL enquiries. We initially chose Sun for its proven security, reliability, scalability, and robustness over and above other platforms, and we have not been disappointed. There’s no need for day-to-day maintenance on the system — it just runs and runs. In fact, it has not had to be rebooted since we installed it in June 2000, which means there’s been zero system downtime since going live!”

Emphasizing Team Netsol’s enthusiasm for the Chelsea project, Sun Microsystems’ Paul Barrett agrees with Ged Clarke: “Team Netsol’s solution for Chelsea Financial Services is an excellent example of how an ASP takes full advantage of the Sun Ray architecture. The system delivers a complete customer solution that requires very little expertise or system administration on the part of the customer. Team Netsol has created a flexible hot-desking environment that is robust, easy to use, and can accommodate additional users during peak periods in the financial calendar.”

Commenting on behalf of Chelsea, Systems Manager Stewart McDermott adds: “The day to day benefits of the Sun Ray clients for Chelsea Financial Services are clear. Each user has a quiet, reliable client with the ability to access their session from anywhere in the office. There is no need for the technical staff to do maintenance at the desktop — we do software distribution and upgrades centrally, either with or without the help of Team Netsol. The installation enjoys all the power and reliability of Sun servers and the ‘plug and work’ convenience of Sun Ray desktops.”

Although Ged feels it’s early with regards to future development of the system, he is beginning to formulate some ideas. “The next things we’re looking at will be to include printing facilities within Java, which will create a considerable speed improvement. And we’re considering an enhanced Web browser to improve the speed of the system overall.”

“Chelsea was the first Sun Ray implementation for Team Netsol — and one of the first Sun Ray implementations anywhere in the UK. However, we’ve been so impressed with the technology and the flexibility of the Sun Ray that we are now recommending and implementing them on a regular basis. We definitely see a bright future together.”

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