



Ingram Micro | IMSN Case Study

Business Challenge

Time constraints, heightened airport security, skyrocketing travel costs and the need to go green have long stifled the use of book tours. Toronto-based company Unotchit (pronounced “you-no-touch-it”) sought to solve the problem through a revolutionary long-distance pen-and-ink technology they trademarked as “LongPen.”

Approach

Unotchit collaborated with expert solution provider GenX Solutions to implement a combination of internet-based video conferencing and cutting-edge robotics to remotely autograph books and other items from any location in the world.

Solution

GenX Solutions turned to Cisco System’s networking hardware — as well as technical resources available through the Ingram Micro Services Network (IMSN) — to deploy LongPen in key global facilities and provide on-site management for every event.

Results

Since its 2006 launch, LongPen technology has grown into a viable and cost-effective solution that enables authors — and many other celebrities — to interact with fans in places too costly to physically visit.

REMOTE WRITING TECHNOLOGY

INGRAM MICRO SERVICES NETWORK MEMBER HELPS LAUNCH BOOK TOURS INTO CYBERSPACE

Book tours have previously been the optimal path for authors to provide personalized autographs to fans while fueling publicity and driving sales.

Recently, however, these travel-intensive events have suffered from heightened airport security and skyrocketing fuel prices — making them viable options for only the biggest authors visiting the biggest cities.

One celebrated Canadian author, Margaret Atwood, had a better idea: a concept called LongPen technology.

Her invention became the first long-distance, real-time autographing device to operate over the internet, with an electronic pen that uses electricity and fiber optics. This interactive technology enables an author to produce an original signature that’s transmitted long distances and inscribed — in real ink — on the book, CD or other item.

A growing number of authors, including Dean Koontz, Robert Kennedy Jr., Norman Mailer and Tim Flannery, have begun using this technology with astounding success, and more are sure to follow.

Bringing LongPen Technology to Reality

LongPen debuted at the London International Book Fair in April 2006, but fell short of realizing its full potential due to technical complications. What’s more, its original communication infrastructure — a global multiprotocol label switching (MPLS) system — would have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars annually.

Unotchit sought to overcome these challenges with the help of an expert IT solution provider, Toronto-based GenX Solutions.

This premier Cisco partner quickly began designing a new communication infrastructure based entirely on Cisco networking hardware. The design needed to facilitate communication between two entities — a broadcast point, where the author was located, and whatever receiving kiosk was hosting the fans.



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Thanks to direct collaboration with Cisco, the system design was done in about two weeks; rollout began in June 2006 and full implementation was completed in November.

Each LongPen broadcast point and receiver kiosk features a Cisco 871 router, which is preconfigured to join a Dynamic Multipoint VPN network (DMVPN). When in use, these routers direct traffic to Cisco 1811 routers, which reside in major co-location facilities around the world. Plus, the 1811 routers enable GenX Solutions to use Secure Sockets Layer (SSL)-VPN technology.

“SSL-VPN enables us to connect LongPen systems to the network when we’re behind corporate firewalls or in other situations in which standard VPN technology won’t work,” says Martin Warren, vice president of sales for GenX Solutions.

Drawing on Worldwide Resources

Because of LongPen’s technological complexity, deploying the proper networking infrastructure was only half of the solution.

For optimal success, LongPen events may require technical experts to provide on-site management for both the broadcast point and receiver kiosk. But since these events can take place anywhere in the world, finding qualified and experienced technicians could have been a problem.

Fortunately, GenX is a part of the Ingram Micro Services Network (IMSN), an organization of more than 10,000 certified IT services professionals who work together to provide IT service

and support for customers in all 50 United States, Puerto Rico and Canada. As GenX learned, this network is also helpful for identifying technical resources in other areas around the world.

“The IMSN has enabled us to provide on-site technical support services for a wide range of LongPen events — regardless of their geographic constraints,” explains Warren. “When LongPen needs a kiosk installation or has an interested remote user, the event’s location is simply not a barrier. They just tell us where the event will be held, and we’ll make sure the technicians are there.

“The IMSN has enabled us to increase our service availability, while allowing LongPen to realize the geographical expansion that otherwise might not have been possible,” he adds.

Reaping the Rewards

“Our current solution with GenX and Cisco has completely eliminated our need for an MPLS system, so right there we’re saving hundreds of thousands of dollars a year,” says Bruce Walsh, vice president of sales and marketing of LongPen. “Plus, we have complete confidence that this solution can now do exactly what we set out for it to do.”

Thanks to LongPen, book-signing events can now move beyond the limits of brick-and-mortar locations into cyberspace — and the benefits are many.

Business Opportunities

If you’d like to expand your business or geographic reach like GenX Solutions did, consider partnering with Ingram Micro’s On-site Professional Services (OPS). You’ll be able to provide the installation and support your customers require regardless of your location or available infrastructure. For more information, call (714) 566-1000, ext. 24896, or e-mail imsnservices@ingrammicro.com.

For more information about Cisco networking solutions, visit www.ingrammicro.com/cisco.

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