

Fast net breaks bottleneck

case study | **Chrismont winery**

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WINEMAKER Warren Proft likens broadband to the mobile phone: once you have it you can't imagine life without it.

The boutique winery in northeastern Victoria only connected to satellite broadband less than a year ago. Before that it made do with an unreliable dial-up connection.

"We were lucky to get 16-22Kbps and even for one personal computer that's barely enough even for email and a bit of web browsing," Proft says.

"It's a relatively big area to be covered by one exchange. It's a wet area too and very rural, so you've got electric fences and things like that. There's a fair bit of interference."

Chrismont, about three hours drive from Melbourne, began growing grapes in 1980 to supply wineries.

The majority of its grapes are still supplied to wineries, but in 1996 it began producing its own wine and earlier this year scored its first export tender, to Sweden.

It occupies about 100ha in northeastern Victoria.

As the company grew, it wanted to start a small local network so staff could share an internet connection, Proft says.

"Also, we wanted to look at starting things like mailing lists and wine clubs," he says.

"We wanted to do more research and development on the internet, find out what people were doing, check out other people's websites, develop our own website, and communicate easily with our graphic designers and website designers."

The lack of bandwidth was proving costly because frequent connection time-outs and dropouts were affecting business with customers and partners, and large downloads, critical system updates and large distribution lists for the company's marketing activities could not be completed during the regular work day because internet traffic came to a halt.

The bandwidth was also causing a problem in the release of a new website because it had insufficient bandwidth for easy uploads to the host server.

"Also, I guess there was a lot of head space and heartache in having to be concerned about whether something arrived, following up with phone calls and things like that," Proft says.

The winery decided to go with satellite broadband from NewSat (the satellite delivery arm of Australian-listed Multiimedia) and received a federal government grant under the Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme.

NewSat Asia-Pacific general manager Mark Morgan says the broadband allows companies to expand their businesses and go for export opportunities.

"They had issues with dial-up trying to get access to the website, to upload information, so obviously the higher data rate allows them to get information to their customers, their suppliers, it allows far greater communications rather than a couple of short lines in an email," he says.

"They can now send photos with text and so forth and get a pretty quick reply."

Proft says the winery uses the internet as a tool more than it previously did.

"It's amazing how you become quickly reliant on it," he says. "It might be like mobile phones. How did I ever get by before they were around? We're doing a lot of marketing and research on the internet, we've designed and created a website in a relatively short time because we're able to communicate effectively with our graphic designer, our web designer and others in our company."

The winery has also developed a wine club and a regular email newsletter.

Proft says the broadband has increased productivity.

"We're spending less time doing tasks on the internet. We're doing more on the internet and probably doing more things more productively. If we can do more in less time we'll end up doing more."

Without the higher bandwidth, it would have been necessary to outsource the customer mailouts and newsletters, keeping the database on somebody else's computer and the development of the website would have been slower.

Electronic banking is another benefit.

"Now we've made the move, we couldn't possibly think of being without it," Proft says.

"As a matter of fact, now we're looking at how much it would cost to scale up.

"Another advantage of this scheme is it that it's so scalable: the hardware is in place and it's just a matter of how much you want to pay."

THE PROBLEM

Chrismont Wines's dial-up internet delivered speeds of only 16Kbps to 22Kbps. The low bandwidth affected the Victorian winery's ability to communicate with customers and partners, develop a website and install critical systems updates.

THE PROCESS

The company installed satellite broadband from NewSat.

THE RESULT

The winery achieved faster, more reliable communications and is considering scaling up.