

8el Connects Growing Number of Mobile and Home Workers to Corporate IT Systems Securely and Cost-effectively



www.8el.com

Challenge:

The challenge for 8el was to meet the increasing demand from its customers for a facility to connect a growing number of mobile and home workers to corporate IT systems securely and cost-effectively.

Objectives:

- Maintain total system security
- Minimise capital costs and complexity
- Control access to selected internal resources
- Manage remote devices efficiently
- Offer a managed portal service

Solution:

The 8el WebConnect service is based on Secure Socket Layer [SSL] remote access VPN (virtual private network) technology, utilising the Juniper Networks Secure Access (SA) series.

Customer Benefits :

- Ease of use
- Highly secure connections
- No capital outlay
- Cost effective remote access
- Controlled application access
- Fully scalable
- Minimised support costs

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Justin Hamilton-Martin,

MD
8el

About 8el

8el was founded in 1999 with the aim of providing highly tailored voice and data solutions backed by first class support. Today, 8el services over 35,000 users throughout the U.K. Its broad range of solutions delivers significant financial, quality and strategic advantages, closely aligned with customer requirements.

With rising pressure on enterprises to find solutions to increasingly complex communications challenges (such as the growing community of home and mobile workers versus proliferating security threats), 8el is well placed to consolidate further its position as a leading specialist operator. With a sound reputation for providing a one stop shop for voice, data and converged networks backed by first class quality support, 8el's next goal is to deliver the benefits of IP-based Next Generation Networks such as Voice over IP (VoIP) and media rich services to the mid corporate market.

Posting an average annual sales growth of 105 percent over the last three years, 8el was listed as the third fastest-growing telecoms business by the Sunday Times newspaper and a very respectable 28th overall.

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The Challenge

The demand for secure remote access to corporate networks has been increasing rapidly in recent years. Whilst major corporations tend to have significant IT departments to specify, maintain and support such systems, 8el’s objective is to provide a fully managed and secure remote access service for those smaller companies which do not have extensive IT departments.

8el’s MD, Justin Hamilton-Martin explains, “At the moment, we have roughly 100 corporate clients on our network, supporting approximately thirty-five thousand users, so our average customer has approximately 350 employees. We are finding that the majority of these mid-market companies have a relatively low proportion of remote workers - however, remote access is an increasing trend, and therefore creates a growing security risk; with lots of new threats appearing, it only takes one insecure connection to jeopardize the entire corporate network. Our strategy is to take a portal approach so that customers can have secure remote access to their network via our portal, rather than incurring the capital costs involved in building their own platform.”

Justin continued, “In our view, for many years the mid-corporate market has been starved of good service from the large telcos. The market challenge is to provide tailored and more flexibly priced solutions backed up by excellent service, to suit the budgets and demands of the smaller corporate”.

The Solution

Karl Jackson, 8el’s Network Architect recalled, “We searched the market for a suitable appliance as a platform for our secure remote access service, which we call 8el WebConnect. We were introduced to Juniper Networks security products through our partner Axial Systems (formerly Network Alliance) about eighteen months ago.”

“We wanted to create something that was very easy for IT departments to roll out to their internal users, so that all they had to have was a web browser; they would then log on and be up and running, which was the main reason for an SSL rather than an IPSec VPN solution.”

Karl further explained, “SSL technology allows you to access your head office applications from anywhere where you’ve got internet access, this could be a hotel, a web café, an airport kiosk – you could even be on a customer’s site.

“As I said, we’ve had the portal for about 18 months now. In the early days there was a lot of talk about SSL technology, which provided the benefits of flexibility, ease of connectivity and security – we felt that this was going to drive the natural progression from dial up to using broadband to connect to a corporate network. Although you are going over the public infrastructure, which provides value for money, it is also very secure – the best of both worlds.”

Justin continued, “One of the big challenges for IT departments is to be able to handle the requests from their remote broadband users to connect to the internal network. IT managers couldn’t manage or control the amount of bandwidth users would take from their Internet pipe. Our WebConnect portal means that we can actually configure the system so that users can only take a certain proportion of the available bandwidth. This gives the IT department the ability to optimise their system, manage priority users and it controls the costs as well.”

“The SA series was initially designed for a single enterprise, so we’ve re-engineered our network to segregate customers. Juniper has recently spent a lot of money on R&D to give the SA3000 even more facilities and features, some of which will allow us to control concurrent users more efficiently, allowing easier internal management for 8el.”

Note: Juniper has also recently launched the SA 6000 SP, which is specifically designed as a platform for service providers such as 8el to use as a basis for managed SSL services.

“The procurement process was a simple one for us – that is one of the benefits of being a small company,” explained Justin. “Our commercial director built the business case and it was presented to our management team. It was unanimously agreed. From there, it was straight to the proof of concept and roll out phases.”

The Benefits

The benefits of using the SA3000 as the basis for the 8el secure remote access managed service, WebConnect, are many. Firstly, the SA3000 allows 8el to provide its clients with a reliable, flexible, remote access service to their corporate networks. This means that a client, as well as having no capital outlay, also avoids training and ongoing IT management support costs (for example, an IPSec alternative requires a piece of “client” software to be installed and maintained on every user’s PC. This can create an ongoing logistics nightmare regards upgrades, license renewal, bringing new users online, etc). In addition, the secure remote access service from 8el is scaleable, enabling variation in the numbers of staff using remote access, minute to minute. The level of access a remote worker is allocated can also be varied according to dynamic business needs, as well as the security status of the PC being used to attempt access.

For 8el, the benefits of using the SA3000 product, is explained by Chris Sayer, 8el’s marketing director, “Clearly Juniper is a recognised brand, it’s known in the market place and is a trusted and robust product; this means that we don’t have to get into a debate with our clients on whether they trust the technology – using Juniper Networks, you have already achieved that.”

Looking to the future, Chris said, “We want to become a one-stop shop with a reputation for providing superb support backed up by a comprehensive service level agreement [SLA] – that is the basis on which 8el was founded. WebConnect is an important service contributing to this objective.”

Justin concluded, “Our role is to take the risk out of technology and just deliver the service to our customers. Using Juniper Networks products really supports us in this endeavour.”

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Chris Sayer
Marketing Director
8el



**CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS
AND SALES HEADQUARTERS
FOR NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA**

Juniper Networks, Inc.
1194 North Mathilda Avenue
Sunnyvale, CA 94089 USA
Phone: 888-JUNIPER (888-586-4737)
or 408-745-2000
Fax: 408-745-2100

www.juniper.net

EAST COAST OFFICE

Juniper Networks, Inc.
10 Technology Park Drive
Westford, MA 01886-3146 USA
Phone: 978-589-5800
Fax: 978-589-0800

**ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL
SALES HEADQUARTERS**

Juniper Networks (Hong Kong) Ltd.
Suite 2507-11, Asia Pacific Finance Tower
Citibank Plaza, 3 Garden Road
Central, Hong Kong
Phone: 852-2332-3636
Fax: 852-2574-7803

**EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA
REGIONAL SALES HEADQUARTERS**

Juniper Networks (UK) Limited
Juniper House
Guildford Road
Leatherhead
Surrey, KT22 9JH, U. K.
Phone: 44(0)-1372-385500
Fax: 44(0)-1372-385501