eLab News

The Broadband eLaboratory Newsletter - February 2004

website: www.broadbandelaboratory.co.uk   E-mail: info@broadbandelaboratory.co.uk

eLab booking and information line:

Tel: 01254 828269

eLab News:

is produced by
Instant Search Ltd.
4 George Street
Whalley
Lancashire
BB7 9TH

Tel: 01254 822288

Red Rose Court in Accrington - a major "hotspot" of broadband connectivity

A key partner in the eLaboratory project has been the East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce, and since the opening of the Accrington eLaboratory site in the Chamber offices at Red Rose Court, a team of Chamber staff has played an important role in the various activities that have taken place.

The team is headed by Mike Caulfield, the Chamber's Internet Manager, supported by Shafiq Khan, Technical Manager, and Project Manager Roger Gibson, who has been involved in most of the demonstrations carried out so far.

When a demonstration is arranged, visitors attend the Whalley site, and during the session a link up takes place with the team at the Accrington site to demonstrate the video conferencing facilities. As with the Whalley site, there is a range of equipment available at Accrington which can be utilised to demonstrate the uses and benefits of broadband connectivity in video conferencing. A Dell computer and an Apple Mac computer are available for demonstrations, both with video conferencing capabilities, and in addition there is a high speed video conferencing link attached to a plasma screen.

As well as demonstrations, the video-conferencing suite at Red Rose Court is also available for use by the area's businesses and other organisations, enabling business people to communicate face-to-face without the hassle of expensive travel. Having been involved both in demonstrations and setting up the facilities for private use over the past year, Mike and his team have been able to assess the reaction from delegates attending sessions, and Mike says the comments have been very enthusiastic.

A videocoference in progress at the eLaboratory in Accrington

"People have been surprised at the simplicity of what's involved", he says. "Many visitors expected the process to be very technical and complicated, but we have been able to demonstrate that is not the case. It's also become apparent that, although it may suit everyone, videoconferencing can deliver huge benefits to certain companies. One delegate told us that he used to spend hours on the road travelling to central points around the UK to meet up with colleagues from other offices to discuss architect's drawings. Now with video conferencing, they can link up with one another from their individual offices without having to travel, and utilise their time more effectively as a result".

Another interesting feature of the Accrington site is that visitors can take advantage of the wireless "hotspot" which is located in the Reception area at Red Rose Court. The idea of a hotspot is that it can offer instant high-speed Internet connections to anyone with a wireless enabled laptop or palm held portable, without them having to connect to network cabling or a dial-up modem. (contd. over)

Red Rose Court (contd.)

This means users can send and receive email, browse the Web and even log on to their own company Intranet when away from their office. Up to now, hotspots have usually been deployed in hotels, airports, railway stations, conference facilities and other sites that commonly host business travellers, and the East Lancashire Chamber is the first Chamber in the UK to have the facility installed. The system has the benefits of broadband speeds through the elancs.net network that are up to 10 times the speed of a dial-up modem, and Mike Caulfield believes it is a further illustration of the ways in which broadband can benefit businesses.

"These days all new laptops are wireless enabled, and older ones that are not can easily be customised" says Mike. "Most business users of laptops will be away from the office at some point or another, so easy access to e-mails and intranets back at base is a major benefit. Using a hotspot with broadband connectivity is therefore an excellent way to demonstrate how easy it is for business people to utilise modern technology, and broadband connectivity in particular, while they are on the move".
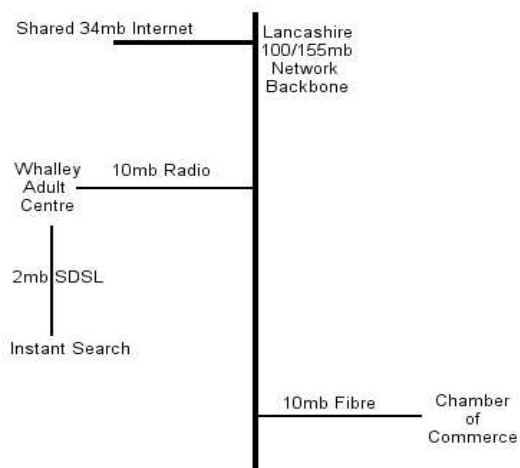
Elancs.net – connecting Lancashire by broadband

Another key player in the Broadband eLaboratory project is Elancs.net, whose broadband network connection is used to connect the two eLaboratory sites in Whalley and Accrington during demonstrations.

Based at the Chamber offices in Red Rose Court, Elancs.net is a project aimed at bringing broadband network connections to all areas of Lancashire. Initially set up to provide high capacity network connections for learning centres across East Lancashire, the concept was expanded to include all sectors, with the aim of providing connections to areas not served by other mainstream broadband services.

The first pilot business connection to Elancs.net was installed at Instant Search in Whalley and the implementation process highlighted the issues involved in moving a business on to a broadband connection. This experience led to Instant Search, in partnership with Elancs.net and the Chamber of Commerce, to seek support from the NWDA in setting up the e-Laboratory project, to demonstrate and develop the benefits of broadband for small businesses.

Elancs.net has contributed to the eLaboratory project in two ways. First, the network connections to the e-laboratory locations at Whalley and the Chamber of Commerce at Clayton are provided by Elancs.net, as illustrated in the diagram opposite. Elancs.net has also provided much of the technical input to set up the e-laboratory demonstration equipment and applications, working alongside Anthony Capstick at Instant Search and colleagues from the Chamber.

Martin Kirk of Elancs.net believes the eLaboratory project is an ideal way of promoting both the benefits of the Elancs.net network, and broadband in general. "The indications are that over the next few years broadband will become as common as other utilities like telephone, gas, water and electricity, but as many

businesses are unsure about the technology and benefits of broadband network connections, they are reluctant to adopt it", says Martin. "For that reason, the e-Laboratory is an excellent way of 'bringing to life' broadband applications and developing better understanding. Now we have the facilities in place, Elancs.net is looking forward to working alongside Instant Search and the Chamber in assisting businesses to use the e-Laboratory facilities to test proposed connections and develop innovative broadband applications".

Calling all visitors…….

The main focus of attention here at eLab News during February has been to carry out a series of pre-arranged telephone interviews, by contacting delegates who have visited the eLaboratory and seen a demonstration.

All attendees are being asked to give their opinions of the demonstration and to explain what they feel they got out of their visit to the eLaboratory, and we'll report on the findings and conclusions to be drawn from the research in the March issue of eLab News.