

Case Study

Major MOD Contract affects worldwide voice recording market

In 1999 AudioSoft, a small, relatively unknown, British company, rocked the communications industry by winning a Ministry of Defence contract in excess of a million pounds. The substantial contract was to supply multi-channel digital recorders to all MoD sites in the UK, Germany, Cyprus, the Falkland Islands and Gibraltar.

The installation of this Commercial Off The Shelf (COTS) PC-based digital recording system represents a breakthrough in voice communication recording procedures within the forces.

impossible. The mounting support costs indicated it was time for a change to more modern equipment".

Investing in Long-term Benefits

As with all high value MOD contracts the tender had to be advertised world wide. In the face of fierce competition, from UK and overseas digital and analogue suppliers, the contract was won by AudioSoft, UK developers of digital speech and computer telephony applications.

The final decision was then made by the Contract Branch who looked at the best value for money. According to Brian Fearon, "It was a very closely fought competition. Because AudioSoft had developed a software package which can be run on any proprietary hardware, it requires no long term allegiance to the manufacturer, or the purchase of expensive bespoke hardware. giving us more control and protection against hardware obsolescence. We also get the ongoing cost benefits of mass PC technology".

"Although the start-up purchase costs of AudioSoft's system were not the cheapest, their use of COTS solutions gives us long term cost benefits in terms of ongoing maintenance and support after 4 - 5 years. This made them the most cost-effective over the product's lifetime",
Brian Fearon

A Smooth Roll-Out

In September 1998 AudioSoft began installing the first of its AudioPC 2000, multi channel digital recorders, in the radio rooms of RAF, Naval, Army and Air Defence Ground Environment bases. Since September 1999, radio communication with the full range of UK and visiting Military aircraft, from combat planes to air transport or Search and Rescue aircraft and helicopters, from all sites has been recorded on the new digital technology.

Background

According to Brian Fearon, Higher Telecommunications Technical Officer, at RAF Brampton, "Since 1987 all air traffic control communications within the RAF had been recorded on analogue reel to reel systems. Even though the manufacturer was doing a very good job in maintaining the existing systems, they had come to the end of their economic life. Recording heads were wearing out, compromising audio quality, reliability and speed of operation. New spare parts were becoming increasingly difficult to obtain, and we often had to rely on old parts to make good. As a result, maintenance costs were escalating and we were experiencing severe shortages of spare stocks which made efficient support



Case Study Solution

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► **A Secure System**

AudioPC 2000 is supplied as a fully redundant system to safeguard against failure. Even though there are only 2200 channels it actually records double that amount. PCs are networked in pairs with one primary and one standby system. A unique health monitoring program connects the two to six PCs, switching control from one to another, if a problem occurs.

on our analogue system. It took us a while to build up confidence that it was actually recording. Now we have used and checked it, we have complete trust in its efficiency”.

► **Help Desk**

Brian Fearon has had excellent feedback on the Help Desk support provided by AudioSoft. "Those sites with the modem facility already in place are very pleased as it saves them a lot of grief, as minor problems can be sorted virtually instantly via the remote diagnostics program. It allows routine checks to be made from AudioSoft's headquarters in Cirencester and if necessary can provide software fixes without having to be called on site."

Jack Ashridge has nothing but praise for the HelpLine. "The remote diagnostics facility is very, very helpful and offers a good service. We can ring at any time and they will take us through any problems. They have been brilliant."

► **The Way Forward**

AudioSoft had an original three year contract for maintenance and support with a further option for two years, which was taken up and then extended still further.

"If we wish to integrate with other systems or customise certain aspects of the system, we can do so for marginally small future costs"
Brian Fearon

"As new technology emerges we will be able to keep pace cost effectively, while enjoying the immediate benefits of dramatically reducing our overheads and looking forward to long term savings on maintenance costs. When necessary we can discuss a mid-life upgrade to adapt to new techniques coming on the market"
states Brian Fearon.

► **Transcription**

The networked AudioPC 2000 is not location dependent. Linked to a laptop or PC, transcription and audio can be made anywhere. Bill Rawlings, Ground Radio Manager, responsible for RAF Cranwell and Barkston Heath is impressed with the quality and ease of message location provided by the AudioPC 2000. "The ability to playback on a portable machine is a boon. With our old reel to reel we could only replay the tape in the radio room with all the extraneous background

noise distracting us.

► **Proven Technology**

After some initial trepidation, Jack Ashridge. Ground Radio Manager, responsible for communications and radar equipment at RAF stations in North Yorkshire, was impressed with the system's ease of use, three months after installation.



"The new system looks after itself with very little maintenance, it is very reliable and tells us when it is not working correctly... we have complete trust in its efficiency", Jack Ashridge. Ground Radio Manager

"We were a bit reluctant at first because, other than the graphics on screen, we could not see what was happening, unlike tapes going around