

# Estate uses BT cable to satisfy need for speed

A Northamptonshire farm solved its broadband problems by tapping into an existing BT fibre line and running the cable around the estate to create its own network.

**Emily Padfield** explains how it works



**S**ometimes, it seems as though BT taunts those without access to decent broadband by plastering advertising slogans such as “super-fast fibre here” on tantalisingly close exchange boxes. Only, it isn’t – nor is it likely to be anytime soon.

This was the case for Courteenhall Estate in Northamptonshire. Despite being near the M1 and less than 10 minutes from Northampton, there were no plans for BT to bring fibre-speed broadband to the exchange covering the estate, for the obvious commercial reason that there were not enough houses to make it viable, says managing partner Johnny Wake.

The estate, as well as farming and contracting 1,200ha, has a number of rental properties, is a popular wedding venue and offers corporate events such as clay pigeon shooting.

“Obviously, it’s a prerequisite now to have broadband not only for the farm business but also for the estate as a whole, and although we did have conventional broadband, it was painfully slow at little more than 0.4Mbps.

## SLOW SPEEDS

The other major bugbear was the fact that it was excruciatingly slow for external advisers to connect to the network remotely, which was a necessity for some parts of the business.

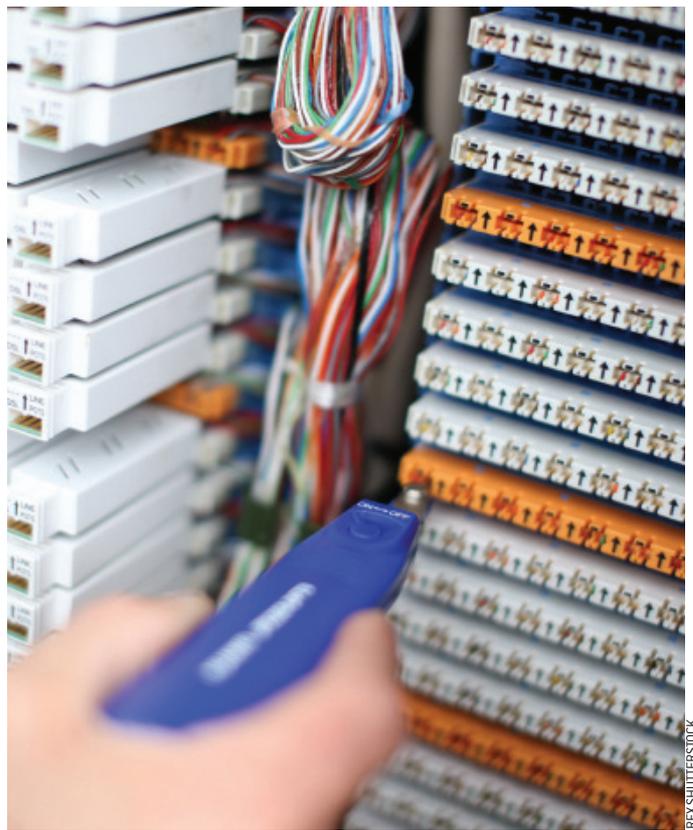
The company had a contact at IT specialist Comtact, a company responsible for everything from data management to network systems for multinational companies.

“It was a very small project for a company like Comtact, who are more used to huge installations, but they were willing to take it on,” says Dr Wake.

Comtact started by looking at the various options available, which were satellite, mobile technology or fibre.

“We had tried satellite broadband on several occasions but we couldn’t seem to make it work,” explains Dr Wake.

The other potential downsides of satellite were that the speed isn’t guaranteed, the service is very dependent on weather conditions and, in general, it isn’t as reliable as a hard-wired option, according to



Courteenhall Estate now enjoys a bandwidth capacity of 100Mbps after tapping into a fibre optic cable at the end of the drive.

Rasel Khan of Comtact.

Relying on mobile technology can also be hit and miss, adds Mr Khan, as it’s not a guaranteed service either.

## END OF THE DRIVE

After carrying out a survey to find out where the nearest fibre cable was, Comtact discovered that it ran right by the end of the estate drive. BT had made it clear that there were no plans timetabled for fibre-fast speeds to become available to the estate or even the local village, but were willing to run their service to the gatehouse, where the ISP would then terminate.

“A tender was then put out to various network providers to see which would be willing to offer a service, and BT was successful. Essentially, everything hangs on the connection point in the lodge at the end of the drive,” explains Mr Khan.

Comtact, alongside the estate and infrastructure specialist J Brand, then created a dedicated network for the estate by running cable from the gatehouse to the estate office, where the server is now housed. From here, cable was fed out to all the relevant properties.

“We dug all the trenches and laid the ducting for the cable ourselves as we had the machinery and labour,” adds Dr Wake. To date, he reckons they have put down

roughly 2,900m of cabling.

With the network now installed and fully functional, most houses and cottages in the heart of the estate are connected and using the service at standard broadband rates, only this is paid to the estate instead of a provider.

## STREAMING TV

“We have a bandwidth capacity of 100Mbps, but actually only require 10Mbps at the moment. Sometimes in the evening, when everyone is streaming TV online we might get to usage of 9Mbps, but that’s rare and we haven’t needed to extend it yet but it does mean it’s future-proof.

“To be honest, it’s difficult to put a value on the benefits it brings to us for everyday business or our daily lives, but it isn’t cheap. Everything just works, and it’s no longer a struggle to get things done online.

“It has dramatically improved upload speeds and our Voip [voice over internet protocol] phone calls are now very clear.”

Crucially, it also makes the estate more attractive to both potential business and residential tenants.

“Another advantage is that only our team and tenants are using the network, which means if there are any cases of overuse then we can have a quiet word or throttle the bandwidth if it ever came to that.” [fwbusiness@rbi.co.uk](mailto:fwbusiness@rbi.co.uk)



Courteenhall Estate managing partner Johnny Wake says they have laid roughly 2,900m of cable to get the internet working.