IBM

Wiring manufacturer taps into expanded connectivity and more with IBM Network Station

Do you drive to work or spend your days toiling in a modular office cubicle? If so, then you may already rely on Group Dekko, the Indiana-based manufacturer of pre-wired electrical circuits. That's because this $275 million, privately-held company's wiring harnesses are used in everything from off-road vehicles to office furniture and in-home appliances.

But these days, Group Dekko is doing more than just making better connections for its customers. It's also making better connections for its workers with the IBM Network Station network computer.

Rather than burdening himself with the expense and hassle of setting up new PCs — or simply swapping old terminals for new ones — Edwards has chosen a wiser course: installing new IBM Network Station network computers where the terminals are, and retiring his old 5494 controllers.

"The Network Station is great. It gives us multiple 5250 sessions and multiple windows, plus a pathway to the Internet and Java applications," he says. "And its ruggedness makes it ideal for a shop floor environment like ours. I really can't

Application	Shop-floor access to IBM AS/400-based enterprise manufacturing system; replace older terminals
Hardware	IBM Network Station, IBM AS/400
Software	Enterprise manufacturing package

Access to everything

To operate its more than 50 manufacturing facilities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, Group Dekko uses 20 networked AS/400 business systems running an enterprise manufacturing package. Until recently, workers used aging 5250 terminals located on the shop floor to access the application, which handles everything from order entry to labor and quality management.
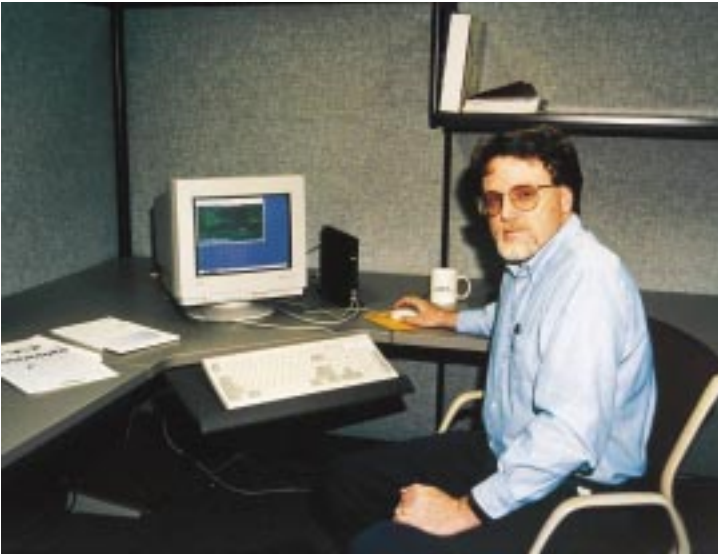
"We have about 75 terminals out there that badly need to be upgraded," says Chris Edwards, director of MIS at Group Dekko. "But we don't want to replace them with PCs, because of the time and money it takes to get PCs running and keep them running."

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imagine putting a PC with its hard disk and other components out there."

Edwards says that once he installed the Network Stations, users immediately appreciated the improved color and screen resolution, plus the ease of the Network Station's graphical user interface. "It sounds like a small point, but the Network Station is easier on the eyes, and that counts for a lot when you're looking at the screen all day," he says.

In addition, Edwards points out that users can have more applications up and running at once than they could with their terminals, with performance equivalent to a Pentium PC running Windows NT. He notes: "Users are absolutely amazed to be able to get on the Internet."

Save now, save later

So impressed has Edwards been with the Network Stations that now he's even considering them as replacements for some of the company's 400 PCs in addition to its terminals.

According to Edwards, most of the desktop applications his workers use — primarily an office suite and e-mail — would run as efficiently or more so on the Network Station as on a PC. And he sees huge potential for Java applications, whose platform independence may "finally untie us from the shackles of Windows."

"We're laying the foundation for PC replacement in certain areas of our business because PCs cost us between $15,000 and $30,000 over three years to support," Edwards says. "Naturally, with the Network Station, we'll save money up front. But the real bang for the buck comes in server-based systems management, where it will cut our costs tremendously. I'd say as much as 70 to 80 percent."

Edwards also points out that the Network Station's simplicity and reliability will keep it up and running more often than a PC, reducing downtime and enabling Group Dekko's workers to be more productive.

Solid support from IBM

Although Edwards considered other vendors to supply his company's network computers, he quickly settled on IBM. The support he's gotten for his 20 networked AS/400s, he says, made him a big fan of the company.

"The Network Station was cost-competitive with the other NCs, but the real difference was the support," Edwards affirms. "With IBM, I know I'll get solid support and a complete solution, with no finger-pointing from one vendor to another. I love being able to call the support line, and whatever the problem is, they just take care of it."

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