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The Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) was established in 1963 by the Government of India as an autonomous organisation to help professionalise the country's foreign trade management and increase exports. Since its inception, the institute has been a catalyst for new ideas, concepts and skills for globalising the Indian economy, and is the primary provider of training and research-based consultancy in the area of international business for the corporate sector, the government as well as students.

The institute's portfolio of long-term programmes includes two- and three-year MBAs in international business and a certificate programme in export management. IIFT has also undertaken research studies in collaboration with the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

Recognising the importance of technology in education, and the need to keep up with the latest trends in technology as well as to provide better delivery of educational and research content, IIFT decided to upgrade its IT infrastructure.

tele.net takes a look at the development of the company's infrastructure...

Legacy system

Initially, IIFT made use of a very basic IT infrastructure. It had a small network that comprised systems running on the UNIX platform that had limited functionality. The institute's first network upgrade was to switch over to a Novell-based infrastructure. However, as IIFT's technology-related requirements increased, it realised that its IT infrastructure was not adequate for meeting its long-term goals. Also, without a systematic information technology infrastructure in place, vital information was often found to be fragmented and erroneous, which affected operations at various administrative levels.

The shift

IIFT's main objective was to achieve greater operational efficiency, reduce costs and streamline the communication channels between its various departments.

Today, the institute has a multi-tiered infrastructure in place. The infrastructure is at a layer 3 switching level, which helps to interconnect all components of the infrastructure on a single platform. Over 1,000 users have access to this network.

For its WAN, the institute uses two leased line connections, one between Delhi and Kolkata, and the other between its campus in Delhi's Qutab Institutional Area and its hostel in Yusuf Sarai. The line between Delhi and Kolkata is of 4 MB while that between Yusuf Sarai and Qutab Institutional Area is of 2 MB. Both lines were provided by Bharti airtel.

An optic fibre cable backbone of 1 GB capacity is used to connect all the departments of IIFT, while for intra-campus connectivity, a copper Ethernet network of 100 Mbps capacity is used. IIFT is a member of the Asia-Pacific Network Information Centre and has its own border gateway protocol infrastructure. Both internet service providers are peering on to this infrastructure.

The institute also uses two internet links. These are in the 1:1 ratio and are provided by Reliance Communications (a 10 Mbps line) and Bharti airtel (a 4 Mbps line). The 4 Mbps line will be upgraded to 10 Mbps in the future.

IIFT uses copper and optic fibre wired infrastructure and the campus is Wi-Fi enabled as well. Both mediums are powered by Cisco's network devices. IIFT has developed several enterprise applications in-house using the .NET, ASP, Oracle and SQL software platforms. It also uses a campus-wide application, which caters to and simplifies several office- and student-related activities. Besides these, IIFT has a videoconferencing facility using Tandberg end-points, a web conferencing platform using Microsoft Live Meeting and a Novell Groupwise email server.

The institute also has a data centre, which is spread across 180 square feet, has 14 servers comprising Blade and rack servers and an FC SAN storage capacity of 8 TB. The data centre ensures that the communications infrastructure provides 99 per cent uptime and performs several functions. These include ensuring server uptime as well as data recovery and back-up; facilitating storage management, and hardware and network operations; and streamlining operations and simplifying end-user support.

Ensuring security is of utmost importance for the institute. IIFT uses intrusion detection and prevention systems, firewalls, an antivirus system, and a content filtering system at all levels of the infrastructure. Moreover, all incoming emails are scanned for threats at the gateway level.

Besides, IIFT uses its website to reach out to a wider audience. The institute's official website offers information on the courses available, research and exchange programmes, papers and publications, etc. Its off-campus programs, accessible to students across the country, offer the faculty a platform to post the latest course material, white papers, power point presentations, etc. online, which can be accessed by its students in real time.

Challenges and benefits

The institute did not face any major challenges while upgrading its network as it chose the technologies keeping in mind its present and likely future requirements.

The key benefits of the institution's improved communications infrastructure include significant scalability and capability while offering value for money.

Going forward, IIFT plans to implement cloud computing on all aspects in the campus.

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