

THALES



Building a secure network

Thales UK is trusted by organisations across the private and public sectors to deliver secure network communications. So it's no surprise to find that the company has been involved in PSN right from the start, says Account Director for Government & Commercial, Ross Parsell.

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We live in an age when security is at the heart of public life. Advances in technology make it possible to transfer information across the globe in a single keystroke. And with this ability comes the risk of that information falling into the wrong hands.

Thales UK specialises in helping organisations to mitigate that risk. It has a long history of working with private businesses and government departments to ensure security in their transfer of data. Perhaps best known for its work in the defence sector, the company also provides security for many of the world's top banks, as well as a host of public services providers.

This experience makes Thales a natural partner for the public sector as it transitions to the Public Services Network (PSN). As the company's Account Director for Government & Commercial, Ross Parsell, explains, “We've been involved in the PSN programme for a long time, and are committed to helping central and local government realise its benefits. Our particular expertise is in the security side of PSN – ensuring that organisations have the right level of security for the information they wish to transfer.”

Integrated security

One of the key advantages of PSN, thinks Parsell, is that security is integrated into its design, rather than being a bolt-on that each organisation sets to meet its own needs. “In the past,” he says, “each government department would deal with its own IT infrastructure, and set its own standards when it came to security.”

The disadvantage of this traditional ‘silo-based’ approach to public sector IT was that, even when an organisation set appropriate security levels for the information it handled, there was no guarantee that such levels would be replicated elsewhere. So when one government department handed information to another, it did not know the security of the system it was passing it into.

PSN is different, because security levels are laid down in relation to the sensitivity of the data being shared. That means public services providers can be confident that common standards are being applied across organisations – ensuring continuity in protection from hacking and other risks, regardless of where information is transferred.

Finding your level

The standard security level for PSN is Impact level 2 (IL2), explains Parsell. For organisations requiring a higher security level, such as Defence or Justice, it can be ramped up as high as IL5 – and this is where Thales' experience in secure networks will come in especially helpful.

“We're used to working with clients who require high levels of security in their IT and operational systems,” says Parsell. “So although we're looking forward to working with public sector clients who just want the basics from their PSN set-up, our expertise will be most useful to organisations where security is at the very heart of their operations.”

As part of this, Thales will help local and central government clients ascertain where they need enhanced security, and where the standard configuration will suffice.

“To give an example,” says Parsell, “a local authority doesn't need to encrypt details of a VIP event, as it doesn't really matter if that gets hacked. However the contact details of the VIPs attending would constitute sensitive information, necessitating a higher security level. The beauty of PSN is that it enables this to happen, in a way that is efficient, and highly cost-effective.”

Scalable procurement

The cost savings arising from PSN have been well advertised by the Cabinet Office. Put simply, group procurement enhances the government's buying power, enabling it to secure IT services and connectivity more cost effectively.

Thales was announced as a supplier to the PSN Connectivity Framework in March, and is hoping to have a place on the Services Framework when it is announced in May. And while Parsell is quick to acknowledge the benefits of the Frameworks from a public sector customer's point of view, he also sees their advantages for the supplier community.

“By being on the Framework,” he says, “a supplier knows that its products and services will be demanded by a cross-section of organisations – all of whom are operating to common standards. For Thales, that means we can innovate and develop new products, knowing there is a large and established market for them.”

Even better, Parsell says that the PSN procurement model means large companies like Thales can provide smaller businesses with a route to market.

“We're making SME inclusion a cornerstone of our PSN strategy,” he asserts. “For the past 18 months, we've been saying to smaller, more bespoke suppliers, ‘If you have ideas that will benefit the public sector through PSN, we can partner with you to develop them, and sell them as part of our offer.’”

Such an approach doesn't only encourage innovation in PSN-compliant products and services; Parsell also believes it is essential to stimulating economic growth. “SMEs are crucial to the vibrancy of our country's economy,” he opines. “That's why we're working hard to share the benefits of PSN across the supply chain.”

Transforming government

A further benefit of the PSN procurement model is that it saves government departments dealing with a long tail of suppliers, but still provides access to the work of smaller businesses. This is all part of the efficiency for which government now strives, and Parsell sees it as another example of PSN's ability to transform the work of the public sector.

“The Public Services Network will reduce the government's cost base, enhance innovation in the supplier community, and facilitate streamlined and more secure working across the public sector,” he concludes. “Thales UK is pleased to play an ongoing role in this exciting programme.”

To find out more about Thales UK's security solutions, visit:

www.thalesgroup.com/security