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**SLIMMING WORLD'S NEW 'XPRESSWEIGH' IT SYSTEM TESTED TO THE MAX**

Slimming World is the largest and most advanced slimming organisation in the UK and was founded in 1969 by Margaret Miles-Bramwell OBE, FRSA.

Today there are more than 6,700 groups held weekly nationwide via a network of 3,000 Slimming World trained Consultants who run their own franchised clubs in local communities.

For many years Slimming World used a paper-based system for keeping track of their groups. Members would weigh in and a Consultant would fill out a paper-based sheet and manually send it in to the Slimming World head office.

Once the data reached head office a traditional system of manual data inputting took place, a painstaking task that was not only an inefficient use of staff time, but also the data analysis was slower to research.

Slimming World executives wanted to match their top notch service to their members and their significant achievements with an advanced IT system that would make it easier for their Consultants to administer their groups. So with a high level of quality and care for their members and Consultants, Slimming World developed 'XpressWeigh' a bespoke application specifically designed to optimise the way Consultants can support members easily.

As well as offering weight loss to ordinary members, Slimming World offers a service to a number of GPs and Primary Care Trusts where patients who need to lose weight for their health are referred to groups. The company invests a great deal into ensuring that all its methods and systems are in line with the most up to date scientific research and methods.

Slimming World's 'XpressWeigh' has enabled the company's Consultants to update their members' details within minutes rather than weeks. This means it's faster for the Consultants and they are able to send in the most up-to-date information which can be logged and analysed, in record time. This information, such as new weight statistics, are all essential in tracking the improvements being delivered by Slimming World to ensure the best service to members.

## HOW NETWORK EMULATION ASSISTED IN DEVELOPING 'XPRESSWEIGH'

Once the decision had been made to develop 'XpressWeigh' it was passed to their IT team to make sure that every member in the UK, Northern Ireland, Eire and the USA would not only have full access to the new online system but also a positive experience. Sean Chapman, from Slimming World's IT department, decided to research how best to go about achieving a quality performance experience and whilst at a software event heard a talk given by Frank Puranik of iTrinegy on 'Will it work in the WAN'. The talk seemed to ask the questions Sean had been asking but it also offered the answers.

"It was imperative that our new bespoke application would work in the WAN with many different types of network connections, from clients in large cities to small communities where the network wasn't very sophisticated," said Sean, "We needed to understand the areas that had poor internet connections, areas where latency would impact our application, and some of our Consultants were using old dial-up modems and or had low bandwidth. After listening to Frank's presentation I knew that iTrinegy would be able to help us understand how we could make it work in all network environments."

iTrinegy specialises in emulating different types of networks (WAN, Wireless, Satellite etc) and introduced their INE Compact, a small inline network emulator appliance which was perfect for replicating all the network conditions that Slimming World's Consultants would encounter.

The INE Compact emulator gave Sean's team the ability to simulate various inter-site WAN technologies such as ISDN and ADSL etc., whilst offering the opportunity to simulate the running of the system under high loads on unpredictable networks.

There are many simulation parameters offered by the emulator, including link speed, packet loss, error rates and delay which allowed Sean to fully test 'XpressWeigh' prior to its release. Sean comments "iTrinegy's INE Compact has helped ensure that 'XpressWeigh' works for every Consultant throughout Slimming World and that we have been able to adapt the areas where the network was difficult. This has enabled us to guarantee a positive experience for all our Consultants."

iTrinegy network emulators can also be used to continually test the changing conditions an application may encounter. Sean says: "We continue to test with the iTrinegy emulator any new updates and also regression testing. This has been really useful when testing new code as the INE Compact catches any possible problems prior to rolling out any new updates."

Sean continues. "One of the big surprises was how easy the emulator was to set-up and use, we started to receive meaningful data within an hour, and we were able to test, tweak and work on the application so that when we went live there were no surprises".

To date Sean has found INE Compact easy to use, "We have never had any issues with the emulator, we found it so straight forward and the documentation is simple and easy to use."

## CONCLUSION

"INE Compact has been a very useful addition and has helped us achieve, on time and within budget, exactly what we needed it to do. Our 'XpressWeigh' system has been successful due, in part, to iTrinegy's network emulation technology which helped us understand the issues that the network throws our way."