



# Star Technology Group

## Introduction

As managed service providers, Star Technology Group (STG) needed to ensure good internal security from the outset and as the business continued to grow, so did the need to demonstrate its commitment to information security to customers and prospects. To this end, in 1999 an independent security consultant, Steen Larsen was recruited as director of security with the remit of implementing an information security management system (ISMS) and gaining approval to BS7799 part 2 for the group.

Having been involved in information security since 1995, Steen recognised the problem was not just one of technology but that the solution lay in the introduction of a robust, management system and approached the board of directors with an ambitious implementation plan. The board quickly recognised the internal and external benefits from such an approach and Steen and his team began work on implementing an information security management system (ISMS), setting an ambitious timetable of certification to BS7799 pt 2 in 2002.

## Benefits

As a managed service provider, Star knew they would need an ISMS that would enable them to demonstrate sound working practices and the safe handling of data. They chose approval to BS7799 to demonstrate this and to provide the company with a high level of credibility. Benefits included:

**Competitive advantage:** Approval to the standard is a point of differentiation in the marketplace. There are currently approximately 85 organisations approved in the UK, and just over 150 worldwide\* which means STG can claim to be a member of a fairly exclusive club. And while there are organisations with products imitating the Star product range, the disciplines required of those opting for BS7799 require resource and long-term company wide commitment.

**Engendering ownership:** The owners of the business processes – such as HR, marketing, finance – have been involved from the beginning with the first risk assessment and so have come to recognise and manage the risks inherent in their own roles and departments and have updated processes and procedures accordingly. Company wide awareness and ongoing training programmes keeps the issue of information security front of mind. Certification introduced a feeling of pride with employees.

**Winning business:** Commitment to the standard has already helped Star win business with local and central government, health authorities and larger corporate clients in the private sector. Customers like the assurance that regular, six monthly external audits from an independent, accredited third party certification body bring. This means the implemented ISMS is continuing to meet the requirements of BS7799 pt 2.

\*www.xisec.com @ March 2003.



*“BS7799 is all about proving to our customers that we are providing a secure business. There is no doubt that our commitment to this information security management system standard has already helped us win business.”*

Steen Larsen, director of security,  
Star Technology Group.

# There's more to security than technology...

## CASE STUDY

*"BS7799 has a purpose to avoid you spending money on security that you don't need."*

Steen Larsen was first introduced to the Star Technology Group as an independent security consultant employed by the business to conduct a risk assessment in 1999. His advice to the company then was to implement an ISMS and appoint a manager who would have overall responsibility for security. The company agreed that this was sensible advice in moving forward and growing their business and invited him to take up the position and implement the advice he was giving.

He joined as director of security in 2000. "I found very high levels of technical security at the company however it wasn't being managed in a systematic way. At this point, the company perceived security purely from a technical viewpoint," said Steen. "I persuaded our board of directors that by becoming compliant to BS7799, we are not only benchmarking ourselves against best industry practice but also reaping significant commercial and marketing benefits."

The board were won over – after all, the benefits to be gained far outweighed the resource and effort needed to implement a system and gain certification. The type of customers the group was now beginning to attract valued the assurance that an external third party audit would bring. Those same organisations typically operated a tender system and were increasingly asking the question, 'Do you have accredited certification to BS7799?' The group recognised however well it promoted its internal security, without approval to the standard they could potentially miss out on some major contracts.

In addition, at this point the government were beginning to more heavily promote the ISMS standard. STG recognised that with an increasing interest from governmental agencies and local authorities as an early adopter of the standard, they would gain a valuable unique selling point in the marketplace and be able to steal a march on their competitors.

### **Implementation**

The process began in earnest in February 2000 with the first risk assessment that showed the organisation would benefit from compliance to BS7799. Once the board were sold on the idea, Steen began to establish the critical controls required by the standard in the form of a company wide security policy, basic classification policies, computer and internet usage policy, and email policies.

[www.e7799.com](http://www.e7799.com)



Even at this early stage, Steen and his team worked closely with the owners of the business processes – managers of HR, finance, marketing, etc. To ensure the policies were meaningful to the users, Steen developed high-level security policies for each of these business areas. This meant that the terminology used was appropriate to the users and the policies were meaningful and rooted in fact as they were based on the manager's own assessment of the information held and the risks involved. Departmental involvement at the risk assessment stage has meant business process owners have needed to consider the value of the information held within their departments and have been able to champion the 'cause' from day one with their own teams.

Once these high-level policies were in place, Steen's attention turned to implementing an awareness programme so that all staff were made aware of their responsibilities. The security awareness training has been widespread and has ensured that each member of staff at each level within the organisation have been given training appropriate to their role. This now means that every new starter now gets a one-hour security induction and this continues throughout their time with the company with six monthly updates where staff undergo a half-day course. Here, they undertake role-plays and presentations to ensure that they fully understand the policies in place.

In a little over twelve months, Steen and his team had established the controls required by the standard and rolled out an ISMS awareness programme to staff. It was in early 2001 that the board agreed it was time to work towards certification. 2002 was set as an achievable milestone and the next stage of the programme began.

## Certification with LRQA

*"I was very impressed with the fact that the LRQA assessor really understands our business."*

The first step in preparing for certification was to select a suitable consultancy that could provide the advice and support needed over the coming months. Specialist BS7799 consultancy, Red Island Consulting Ltd had themselves gone through the certification process with LRQA just a few months previous and therefore were in an ideal position to provide the help needed.

Steen explains. "One of the reasons we opted to use Red Island was the fact they had a realistic and very workable risk assessment approach based on 'impact'. And having been certified themselves they knew the practicalities involved, and could give us the advice we needed on the documentation required and the statement of applicability, which is a certification requirement only. Importantly, they could advise on what the LRQA auditor would be looking for so we could ensure all those parts of the ISMS were up to date."

The stage one visit took place in September 2002 where LRQA examined the policies, risk assessment and documented ISMS. John Madden was the LRQA assessor. "It was encouraging to see that STG had recognised that a good ISMS was not just about finding technical solutions to technical issues but that the biggest potential for risk is those people actually using the technology. With the type of customers that STG have, it was important for the organisation to demonstrate it had implemented strict vetting procedures of new employees and then support them with ongoing security training," comments John.

# STG



The stage two visit, assessing the implementation and effectiveness of the ISMS followed in November. The successful outcome resulted in the LRQA assessor, John Madden recommending STG for approval. This meant that the 2002 deadline agreed with the board had been met.

Steen: "We found the external verification process a valuable exercise. A lot of auditors take a checklist approach, however with our LRQA assessor we got more than a tick in the box and felt we really benefited. He took the time to really understand the business dynamics of STG. Those aspects he identified as potential weaknesses helped us in developing a stronger ISMS. He had seen a number of information security management systems throughout a diverse range of companies, and we could learn from that."

star technology  
group

[www.star.net.uk](http://www.star.net.uk)  
Red Island Consulting Ltd:  
[www.redisland.co.uk](http://www.redisland.co.uk)

## Company Background

Star Internet was founded in 1995 by brothers, Ben and Jos White to provide internet connections and end-to-end solutions primarily for the SME market in the UK. The following year, the young company's first product, NetStar won the prestigious Internet Product of the Year so establishing its credentials as an innovative ISP.

Sister company, MessageLabs was formed in 1999 to provide virus-scanning technology on a global basis. The sophistication of their virus scanning technology has enabled MessageLabs to provide a 100% guarantee to stop all email borne viruses – currently the only organisation in the UK to do so.

At the same time, the Star Technology Group was formed as the holding company thereby creating one of the largest privately owned technology companies in Europe with over 350 employees and offices in the UK, USA and Hong Kong.

Today, STG work for central and local government, and leading blue chip companies including many of the UK's best known brand names.

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