Leading manufacturer of high-end audio products simplifies workplace collaboration with Kerio Connect
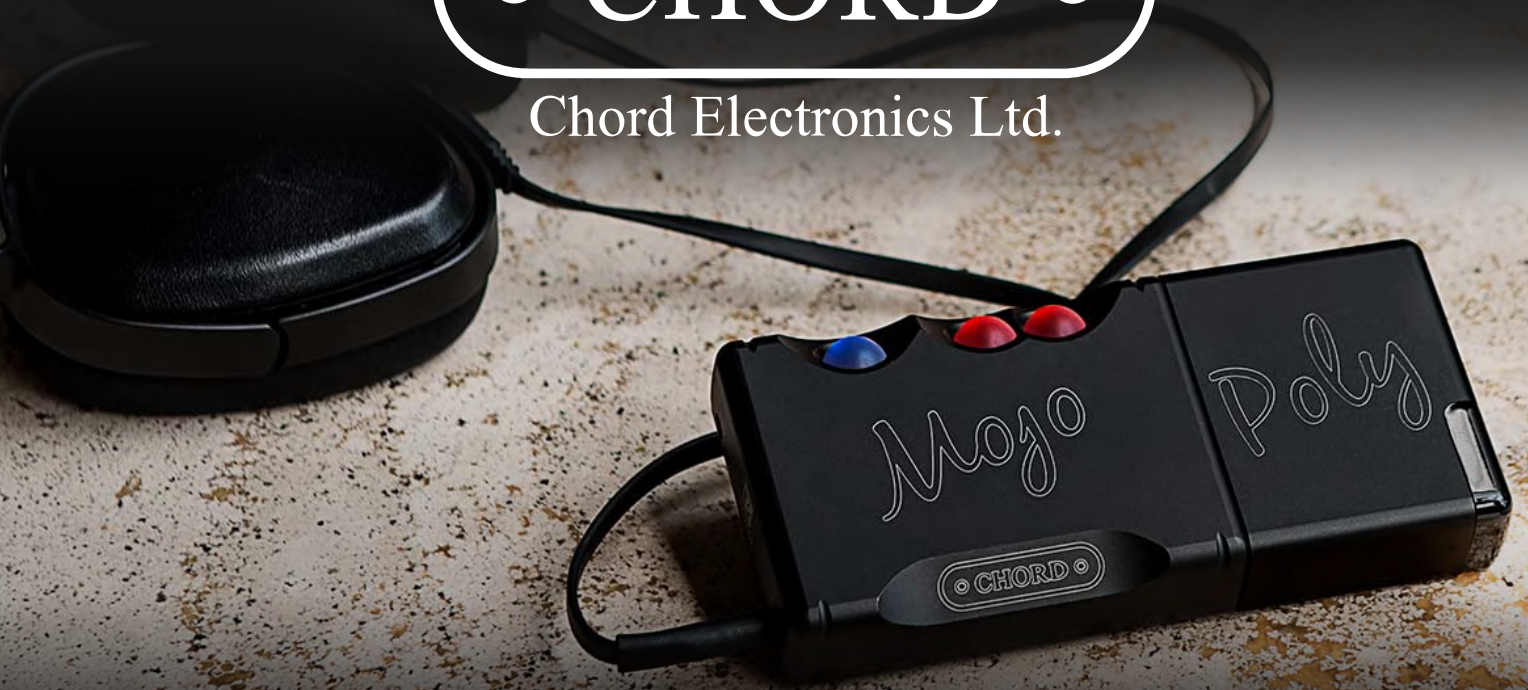
CHORD

Chord Electronics Ltd.

GFI Software™

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INFINIGATE
.... Adding Value to Distribution

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Introduction

For more than 30 years Chord Electronics has produced high-end audio products, both for professional use within studios and also for consumers who value quality Hi-Fi equipment. Chord's stable of products, which are all designed and manufactured in the UK, include power amplifiers, integrated amplifiers, preamplifiers, digital-to-audio converters (DACs) and even portable music streamers. Chord sells directly to retail stores across the UK, and their global network of distributors make Chord products available throughout the world.

Matt Bartlett helms the operations of one of the top companies in the global market sector for high-end Hi-Fi audio equipment. In his job as Managing Director of Chord Electronics, Matt is responsible for overseeing a staff of 30 employees that include engineers, technicians and designers, manufacturing and production workers, sales and marketing staff, and others. Most of the work takes place in the company's manufacturing facility in Kent, and the work is hard but rewarding.

"We work in an extremely competitive industry," says Matt, "where a large number of manufacturers are all trying to sell to the same small group of high end customers." The result of their hard work however is a line of products that are known and respected around the world. "I would consider that we are one of the top companies in our market sector," says Matt. "And certainly with some of our product ranges, we would be considered as the best in the world at what we do." And like most manufacturing enterprises, their clients are mostly other businesses. "We are business to business selling directly to shops in the UK and then through distribution across the world. Currently we sell to over 200 separate businesses covering the majority of the globe."

A challenging environment

Clearly good communication is at the heart of ensuring the success of a business like Chord's. And not just communicating with resellers, but also communication between employees within the company. The production cycle of taking something like high-end audio equipment from basic concept and research into planning, design, prototype testing, manufacturing, assembly, and testing, and finally through to marketing, sales, delivery and support, can be challenging. At each stage of the process fast and reliable communication is essential to make sure everything stays on track and customers are happy with products. Scheduling is also of paramount importance in such manufacturing endeavors as project timelines are set, meetings are held and deadlines are faced and met. Messaging and collaboration using email and calendar software needs to be enterprise-level in quality even for a small company like Chord.

The manufacturing life cycle is not the only challenge Chord faces that requires effective messaging and collaboration tools. Like most small businesses that lack the resources for having their own dedicated in-house IT staff, Chord's computing infrastructure has grown organically over time as the company itself grew and evolved. With hardware and software acquired on an as-needed basis, the result is a typical heterogeneous mix of different platforms and products. "Our system consists of a mixture of desktop PCs, MacBooks, phones and servers," says Matt describing the IT infrastructure used to support Chord's business operations. "The majority of the software we use is Microsoft Office, but we also have some specialist software for testing and programming products. We also run Windows 10 Pro, MacOS and Linux."

With such an assortment of different kinds of devices, operating systems and applications, Chord would probably be at a loss if they didn't have the help and expertise of a trusted partner for their IT services and support. "All our IT support is outsourced to Invicta Linux," says Matt, speaking of a company based in the UK that has a long history within the IT industry. Invicta Linux is one of the market leaders in supplying premium solutions to small- and mid-sized businesses (SMBs). And they're also a trusted GFI partner that Chord used to find the right solution for their messaging and collaboration needs.

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A fast and elegant solution

"With a mixture of both PCs, Macs, and phones, we needed a universal solution that would allow all staff to access email and synchronise calendars regardless of the device they were using," explains Matt. "Our previous solution involved using third party programs and patches to integrate Microsoft Small Business Server (SBS) and Microsoft Exchange into the other operating systems." While such patchwork solutions can sometimes work, they're usually challenging to implement and difficult to support. A single patch when applied could expose the brittleness of such a solution, causing the system to break with the result that meetings are missed and emails lost to the netherworld. It didn't help either that SBS would soon be approaching end of support, or that Exchange can be challenging to administer. Because of these considerations Chord decided to approach their partner Invicta Linux for a solution, and they recommended Kerio Connect.

"After analysing our needs with the assistance of Invicta Linux," says Matt, "we found that Kerio Connect covered all our requirements." An award-winning messaging and collaboration solution from GFI, Kerio Connect provides enterprise-class email, calendars and instant messaging at a fraction of the cost of many other solutions. Designed especially for SMBs like Chord, Kerio Connect offers cross-platform support for a variety of email clients to provide businesses with the kind of flexibility their users often demand. "It does work seamlessly with Microsoft Outlook for the few users at our company who prefer that as an interface," confirms Matt, though others in the company may prefer the Kerio Connect Desktop Client application which can be installed on both the Mac and Windows platforms. Kerio Connect also supports a wide range of different devices including iPhones, Android phones and tablets, which is just the kind of diverse support for devices that Chord needed—and the universal kind of solution they were looking for. And for safeguarding your business email and thereby also your entire network, Kerio Connect includes integrated security using SSL encryption, S/MIME and powerful anti-spam and antivirus tools. Together with the Kerio Control Unified Threat Management (UTM) firewall appliance that Invicta had also installed on Chord's network, Matt is able to sleep peacefully at night knowing the company he manages is well-protected against malware, phishing emails, and other kinds of cyberattacks, many forms of which have risen considerably in frequency during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Easy to use and deploy

Kerio Connect can also be deployed in different configurations offering businesses a range of options in how they want to implement the messaging and collaboration platform. You can install it on a system running Windows, Linux or Mac, even side-by-side with other business applications running on the same hardware. You can also deploy it on a virtual machine running on VMware or Hyper-V if that's your preference. Or you can even choose not to deploy it at all within your premises by opting to use Kerio Cloud or the services of an authorized Kerio Connect hosting provider. And once installed, Kerio Connect is easy to use and administer if your business chooses to manage its own IT resources.
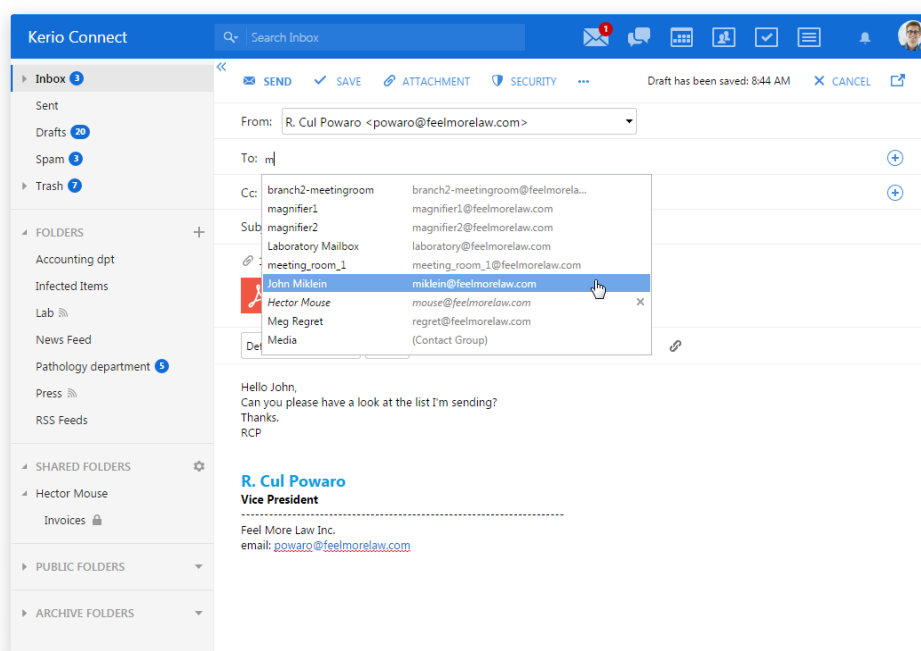
Chord took a different approach however and had their trusted GFI partner Invicta Linux handle both the installation and the management of Kerio Connect for them. Like any reliable provider of IT services and support, Invicta made sure the installation was done quickly and painlessly. "Kerio Connect was installed for us by Invicta Linux," says Matt, "so I can't really comment about how easy it was to implement. But the installation went smoothly and we were up and running very quickly." And how has it worked out for Chord since the installation was performed? "We've become very comfortable with Kerio Connect," replies Matt, demonstrating that Chord is yet another satisfied GFI customer.

Being comfortable though doesn't mean that small improvements still might not be needed with the product. In the rapidly evolving world of technology, businesses need to listen to their customers to find new ways of pleasing them by improving existing products and developing new ones. GFI is one of those companies that takes feedback from their customers seriously by issuing periodic releases of their products to address bugs found and to add new features. In this regard Matt has a couple of suggestions on improving Kerio Connect. "Personally, I would like to see a couple of minor improvements," offers Matt. "It would be good to see the calendar improved so you can copy events. It would also be good if when reading an email that it didn't jump back to the top of the email when a new mail arrives." Such issues are minor however when compared to the benefits that Kerio Connect has brought Chord.

Reaping the benefits

The easiest way to find out how satisfied a customer is with your product is to ask them whether they would recommend it to others who might have needs similar to theirs. In this regard, Kerio Connect has received an endorsement from Matt who, when asked whether he would recommend the product to other SMBs and how he would phrase his recommendations, replied that it involved "easier administration" than their previous messaging and collaboration platform, and highlighted the "ease of use for our users" including those running Outlook.

"The clearest advantage," says Matt, comparing Kerio Connect with their previous SBS/ Exchange solution, "has been our ability to access the emails from anywhere, on pretty much any device, via the incredibly straightforward webmail interface built into Kerio Connect." Doing business today, even for companies in the manufacturing industry which has traditionally taken a more conservative view towards new technology, necessitates adopting an increasingly flexible stance towards how work is done and what employees use to perform their work with. SMBs are embracing the growing trend of bring-your-own-device (BYOD) but they often lack the technical expertise for doing this properly. With Kerio Connect however, companies like Chord can incorporate communication using mobile devices in a secure fashion to ensure business can be done anywhere, anytime and on any device when the need arises— and combined with the VPN capabilities of GFI's companion product Kerio Control, even when employees are working from home during lockdown.
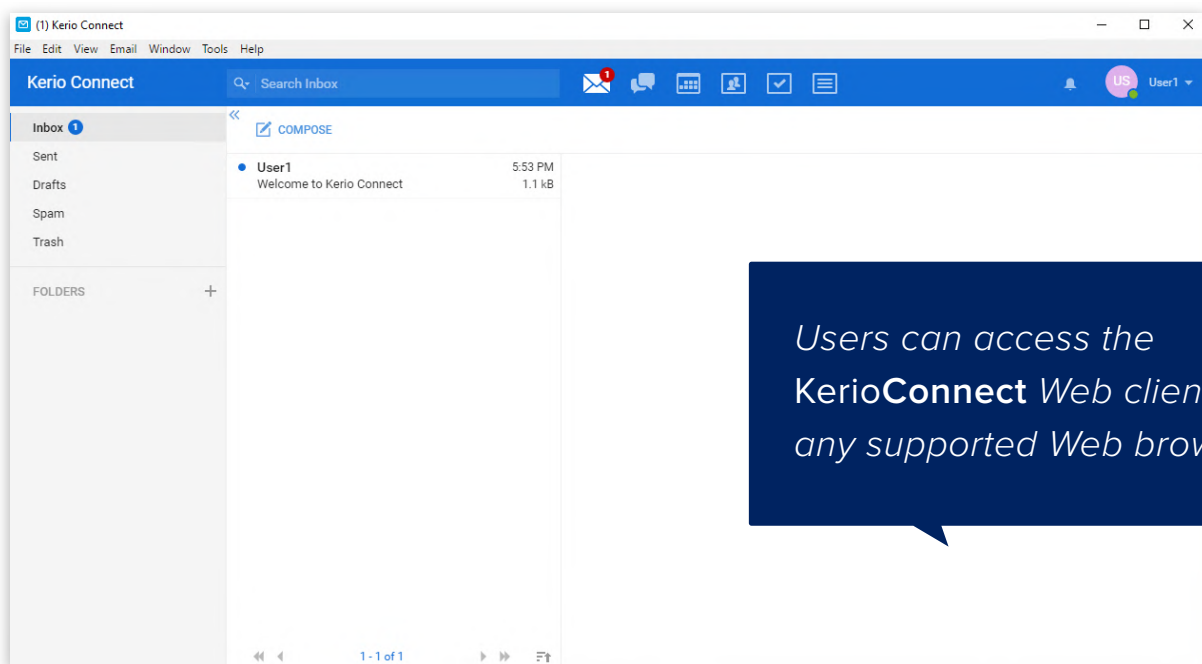
Users can access the KerioConnect *Web client from any supported Web browser.*

Good communication is central for ensuring the success of businesses like Chord. It may be difficult to calculate the exact return on investment (ROI) that using Kerio Connect has provided for the company, or to what degree Chord's employees have become more productive or how much sales have increased as a result of using the product. But the benefit is clearly there according to Matt. "The only comment I can make is that connecting employees with better communication always saves time and money and improves business." And a business that's improving is a healthy one, today and for the future.

Enterprise-class messaging and collaboration

One of a family of award-winning software solutions available from GFI, Kerio Connect is the ideal choice for small and mid-sized businesses seeking greater flexibility, security, and ease of administration for all their email, scheduling and messaging needs. Cutting-edge technology businesses like Chord Electronics know from experience that using Kerio Connect can help them facilitate communications both within their company and also with partners, clients and customers. Easily deployed and intuitive to administer, Kerio Connect includes free migration tools that can help you quickly move from your existing Exchange, IMAP or other messaging system to the universal solution you've been looking for that will enable all your devices to communicate together seamlessly. With different pricing options for the needs of differently sized businesses, and available also as a part of the budget-friendly GFI Unlimited subscription offering, Kerio Connect is fully supported by GFI and available throughout the world through their network of partners and distributors. Try Kerio Connect today knowing that communications— the lifeblood of running your business—can happen easily, anytime, anywhere, and on any device. For more information see **gfi.com**.