



# Case study

## Beam Education

### Overview

This company began life as an advisory project for maths teachers within local government in 1987. Islington Education Authority took over BEAM in 1990 although it eventually became self-funded three years ago. As maths education specialists, BEAM caters for nursery teachers through to secondary schools teachers. They have also extended their portfolio to contract publishing and consultancy with clients like the BBC.

Back in 1990, BEAM's staff comprised of Sheila Ebbutt, now the Managing Director, plus one part time member of staff but has now grown to a team of thirty. They are still based in Islington but have moved to larger premises where we met Sheila and production assistant, Martha Matthews.

### Working together

BEAM is a Mac based operation as they started as a design publication business and chose to keep Macs for all of the administration and operating systems. Sheila explained that she'd experienced a lot of problems with computer maintenance for Macs and had moved support companies a number of times due to receiving very bad treatment. She told us, "I was tearing my hair out! They all seemed completely hopeless. They didn't respond to our calls, gave bad advice – it was just appalling." Out of desperation, Sheila looked in MacUser and after contacting several companies Supportplan came back with a very user friendly and accessible sounding brief. "Since then I've developed a very good relationship with the people within the company and I've never felt inclined to try anyone else." She added, "We've had very good advice from Supportplan. They helped develop the whole network system when we moved premises. They've given us genuine solutions."

BEAM has its own mail order service and large databases and Sheila explained, "We can't afford for our server to go down and that's why we were prepared to spend money on a reliable service." They have Supportplan's Premium service contract, which includes eight-hour call outs, OS issues, parts, labour, and unlimited telephone support. Sheila said, "We've had a few problems along the way with the server but Supportplan has responded very well and in good time."

### Supportplan provides solutions

Martha has the main IT responsibility with an additional three people acting as backup. She oversees any daily problems and maintains contact with Supportplan. She says, "I find their telephone support very good. Even if you only have a small problem they'll take the time to give you step by step instructions so that you can carry it out yourself." She continued, "There are certain software packages that we use. Our data is backed up by Retrospect and we also have FileMaker running a backup too. Retrospect is quite complex so I can look after it on a day-to-day basis but if there are serious problems I call Supportplan."

Martha also stated, "They're very good at solving any problems that have arisen. For instance, we had a fairly new iBook that wouldn't turn on, so we phoned Supportplan and they gave us a few things to try out but the machine didn't want to cooperate." She continued, "They took it in and as they were unable to get an exact replacement from their suppliers, they actually bought a very impressive Titanium Power Book for us to use whilst they were fixing our one."

Sheila finally concluded,



**"One of the best things about Supportplan is that you get to know the engineers as they tend to stay with the company for a long time. These are people that I've known for years and it's great to see them! They're very nice people and they've been splendid over the years."**