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NETWORK
INTERLINKS

Consolidation drives efficiency

Blueprint Partners updates server infrastructure and sets up virtualisation

Blueprint Partners, a London-based marketing communications agency, was quickly running out of space to store its ever expanding data and information. The goal was to consolidate data, create a virtual environment and rationalise the server capacity. The aging infrastructure needed to be replaced with one that is robust and energy efficient.

BACKGROUND BUSINESS NEED

Marketing communications agency, Blueprint Partners has 45 employees and needed to upgrade both its desktop software (to MS Office 2010 and Windows 7) and hardware platforms, as well as consolidate data. "Our existing server infrastructure was running on machines that were going out of warranty and were energy inefficient compared to newer models," says Craig Hill, IT Manager.

"Consolidation was our main goal," he continues. "We had seven different servers - different hardware, different makes and models - running different services - Print, Exchange, Domain, SQL. I wanted to update and consolidate our servers and create a storage area network (SAN) which would provide access to consolidated storage."

Additionally, Craig wanted more capacity for back-ups and to create resilience through a virtual farm which would enable the company to quickly recover servers in the event that they might fail.

Six years earlier, Network Interlinks set up Blueprint Partners' existing infrastructure. And Craig chose them again. He comments, "We did look at other companies but our strong working relationship and their expertise made us inclined to continue working with Network Interlinks."

"They understand our business objectives and their proposal was in line with our needs. We were running out of capacity, on aging equipment, and Network Interlinks has the necessary experience and expertise in Infrastructure, Virtualisation and Business Continuity to set us up with a solution that would improve both efficiency and the processes across the business."

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SOLUTION SUMMARY

- Scalable and flexible data storage

- Solid business continuity plan

- Centralisation of the company's data Microsoft Exchange 2010 and Windows 7

- VMware Server Farm with VMWare's vSphere Essentials Plus

- EqualLogic SAN Appliance for centralised storage and back up.

- Support: telephone and on-site when necessary.

YOUR BUSINESS EMPOWERED BY IT

SOLUTION

Less energy, more efficiency

Blueprint Partners wanted to rip out and replace their server infrastructure, however, instead of a like-for-like replacement, they chose to evolve their IT systems and introduce new technologies.

"Now all our data is on a 16 terabyte, single SAN. This means that we have a central space to store data and, with virtualisation, we can choose to create new servers as and when necessary," says Craig.

There are now only three physical servers (all the same make and model), two of which support the virtual server environment, allowing for resilience and flexibility should one of the physical servers fail. The VM farm supports an Exchange 2010 server (64bit), a file/print 2008 server (32bit), a services/DC 2008 server (64bit) and a Windows XP workstation.

"Once we migrated across to the new environment, the power consumption decreased which also meant less output of heat" says Craig. "A major contributing factor is that we now have less physical equipment." Through the use of shared storage, virtual servers are stored as images, divorced from the hardware. If the need arises, they can be recovered in a much reduced timeframe compared to traditional restores from tape.

The Exchange server has been virtualised. The server is based on a Windows 2008 64-bit operating system with Exchange 2010. The smooth transition and upgrade to Exchange 2010 was done seamlessly and with minimal disruption to the company's staff. Craig comments, "End users were not disrupted in their day-to-day work and were unaware that anything had actually happened. We also now have Windows 7 installed and MS Office 2010 running on all the company's PCs."

"Our capacity was running out so we wanted to rip out and replace our infrastructure to improve efficiency."

CRAIG HILL, BLUEPRINT

OUTCOME

Delivered on time and to budget

Staff have completely changed the way they store information, "There are now file limits imposed for each department. This means that if the limit is exceeded, the entire company doesn't suffer as a consequence and just the team affected needs to clean up its data," Craig explains.

Blueprint Partners also chose to use Network Interlinks' specialist support services. "It bears testament to the robustness of the infrastructure that we have needed very little support," comments Craig, "Generally it's only been when I've been away on extended leave (as I am the sole employee working within IT) or for a very specific task such as reconfiguring the VPN."

"In addition to consolidating our servers, we have put in a resilient business continuity solution," says Craig. "Business continuity matters to us and we feel more secure in the knowledge that information is backed up and replicated across the company."

Blueprint Partners have a second location next door to their current building, connected by fibre, offering an offsite facility where they can house a Disaster/ Recovery solution. In the second phase of the project there will be replication of the virtual environment and SAN storage so if, for any reason, Blueprint could not operate from their primary site, they could from the secondary location.

"We are happy that the project has come in on time and to budget and we've achieved our goals thanks to the partnership we have with Network Interlinks."

"End users were not disrupted in their day-to-day work and were unaware that anything had happened."

CRAIG HILL, BLUEPRINT

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