Switching to CNS for managed IT services has given Image Gallery **more time to focus on core business**

Since moving to CNS for IT services, Image Gallery has enjoyed 100% uptime of their multi-server computer system.

Established in 1984, Image Gallery is a New Zealand success story that's proudly Kiwi-owned. The company creates and distributes greeting cards, stationery, gift packaging, photo albums and other products that fall into the giftware category.

Before switching to CNS in 2017, Image Gallery's IT services were provided a nationwide IT services provider. Edward Robinson, managing director of Image Gallery, talks about why he switched.

"Our IT supplier had just become too big. We lost the individual service and we weren't getting the sort of support we received when we first started. Also, the overall product they were delivering wasn't right. We had a lot of things going wrong. They weren't maintaining our servers as well as they were when we started. I believe it was the result of their growth – they had too many customers to look after."

When the previous supplier changed strategy from targeting SMEs to targeting medium-size businesses, Image Gallery fell outside their scope.

"I heard them on the radio advertising IT services for 50+ seats, and we're only 20 seats. It was pretty clear I needed to find a new IT services supplier."

Fortunately, Edward had a bolt of inspiration about who to call for advice – a mate who had worked at Microsoft.

"I had a longstanding relationship with Boris Lamont from when he worked at Microsoft, and then in 2009 when we installed our Microsoft Dynamics ERP system. While I was evaluating potential IT companies and the servers we needed, Boris suggested I talk to CNS, headed up by the 'other Boris', Boris Wilkitzki."

When Edward and Boris Wilkitzki met, there was an instant rapport. Boris quickly recognised what Image Gallery needed from an IT provider and how CNS could free up Edward's time for his real business – creating and wholesaling beautiful paper products.

When CNS analysts visited Image Gallery and looked into the company's IT infrastructure, a number of challenges emerged:

- Hardware was ageing, but application crashes and slow performance hadn't been analysed or addressed by the incumbent provider.

- The incumbent was reactive rather than proactive, so problems were being 'band-aided' and there was no plan for creating a robust IT environment that would minimise downtime.

- Opportunities to switch to cloud solutions and new technologies were not being identified, so there was no long-term view for advancing and future-proofing Image Gallery's systems.

- Back up and disaster recovery systems were inadequate for Image Gallery's needs.

- Even though Image Gallery had an IT supplier, Edward was doing a lot of day-to-day IT tasks himself.

Bringing these problems out into the light felt like a huge step forward for Edward and his team.

> **"Boris said I shouldn't be doing any IT maintenance tasks. I should be focusing on my core business, not day-to-day IT. He also pointed out that our large database of images and print-ready files – the heart of our business - deserved proper protection."**

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CNS provided Image Gallery with a five-year plan that explained in plain English what needed to happen, offered a number of options, then detailed the pros and cons for each option. Subsequently, a full upgrade of Image Gallery's on-premise solution was implemented after it was identified as the best option for their requirements at the time.

Solving IT problems and setting up robust systems

To date, Image Gallery's new IT environment has an enviable track record – 100% uptime. This is a complete turnaround from an environment that was plagued by server problems and outages.

"CNS looked at what infrastructure would provide the best performance for us. For example they considered our transaction volumes and database load. The diagnostic tools used by CNS were excellent for determining the best configuration for what Image Gallery needed now and moving forward.

> "They solved a lot of our problems by putting in the right hardware to match our software requirements. And they don't just rely on the recommended specs on the box. They actually analyse what the software requires for optimal performance, then build a solution around that."

From a day-to-day point of view, Image Gallery doesn't have to think about their IT infrastructure. A service level agreement is in place to ensure upgrades and maintenance happen automatically.

"We don't have an account manager, as such. I just talk with Boris periodically and we have a key technician who looks after our site. We have 'hands-free' IT that we don't even think about any more. It just works. When admin things pop up from time to time, like new users who need email addresses, we just make a call or send an email."

Disaster-ready and lockdown enabled

Image Gallery's IT environment was put to the test in March 2020 when New Zealand went into Level 4 lockdown for Covid-19.

"Suddenly everyone needed to work from home, so CNS set up remote users and made it happen. Our people were able to access all the files they needed, produce packing slips and send invoices. Being forced closed was tough, but having a robust IT system helped us to bounce back."

Edward is also confident that Image Gallery could now recover quickly from an IT disaster.

"We have multiple levels of backups now and a robust plan for disaster recovery. I'm pretty comfortable that, if the worst comes to worst, we could get back on our feet quickly. Without a working computer and database access, our people would just be staring at the wall!

"In terms of support we especially appreciate that, in addition to resolving issues quickly, ownership is taken of issues that are not directly related to the services provided by CNS, software problems for example. These support services are co-ordinated by CNS with the relevant vendor, so that Image Gallery doesn't need to manage through to a resolution. This aligns with our thinking that IT support is best positioned to manage this on our behalf through to a good outcome."

For Edward, the ultimate proof that Image Gallery's IT infrastructure is in good shape is that it never crosses his mind any more.

> "Being able to focus on our actual business is the key thing that has changed for us. Because our IT just happens, I don't have to think about it. Overall we are very confident in CNS and extremely happy with our decision to partner with them."