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At a Glance

Company: Grafton Merchanting ROI

Industry: Builders' Merchants

Customer Profile

Grafton Merchanting ROI, part of Grafton Group PLC, is Irelands leading builders' merchant operating from over 40 locations, principally under the Chadwicks and Heiton Buckley brands.

Business Challenge

- Deploy an infrastructure upgrade to secure current mission critical systems and support multiple ERP and server environments, which had been sitting on aging infrastructure
- Meet tight timelines and give the business confidence in systems availability.
- Develop an architecture to support migration to a new company-wide ERP system in 2019

Solution

- VMware server upgrade using HP DL380 servers with a 3PAR SAN.
- Windows XP client replacement, upgrade of Citrix servers
- Consolidation of 850 users into one Windows AD and migration to Office 365
- Alpha server replacement with migration to HP-UX servers
- Deployment of HP DataProtector software with server backups to HP StoreOnce infrastructure

Benefits

- The company now has the infrastructural building blocks to meet ongoing business needs.
- A fully resilient and reliable IT based on consolidation and simplified management
- Reduced support costs to the extent the project is cost neutral over 4 years
- Reduced carbon footprint with use of virtualisation technology
- Reduced risk of downtime

Infrastructure upgrade delivers robust technology platform for future IT investment

Grafton Merchanting, Ireland's largest builders' merchants enjoys a robust and resilient IT infrastructure, capable of supporting new business applications into the future, following a major upgrade delivered by Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE) and MJ Flood Technology.

The project secures mission-critical systems and provides the required infrastructural building blocks to allow the delivery of multiple technology projects over time. The organisation is heavily dependent on technology to run its successful merchanting business, operating outlets across 40 locations in Ireland.

"We didn't have the required skillsets to deliver this project using internal resources alone," explained Colm Scannell, head of IT with Grafton Merchanting. "Making the business aware of the project risks was crucial in getting support for the required investment. When the final solution was selected, the whole department stood over it. It gave us the confidence that we selected the right solution and technology partners to deliver it."

Strategy and Goals

Grafton Merchanting ROI, which includes the Chadwicks and Heiton Buckley brands, has multiple ERP and server environments and these environments were running on aging infrastructure.

"We undertook a review of the of IT Infrastructure within the organisation and identified the tasks to secure current systems," said Mr Scannell. "We wanted to allow the IT department to support the medium term planned expansion of the business through both organic growth and acquisition and as a direct result we identified a number of key strategic goals."

Over a series of meetings and reviews it became apparent that HPE, supported by MJ Flood Technology were the one service provider partnership that would be able to support all elements of the project. Overall design of the solution was kept as simple as possible and strived to utilise as many common components as possible. The project was divided into three distinct areas, with underlying technology infrastructure linking all of the deliverables.

1. VMware and Microsoft Upgrade

"We utilised high-end DL380 servers coupled with a 3PAR SAN," explains Pat O'Neill, enterprise consultant with MJ Flood Technology. "We were able to build the required robust VMware virtual environment to support the business."

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This virtualised Windows environment delivered a secure platform for the Accustar ERP system by providing more processing power and storage growth. The server upgrade was performed seamlessly and provides a more secure, and faster environment to this business-critical ERP system.

In parallel to this, over 200 users were migrated away from Windows XP clients to the latest version of Windows and 400 users were moved to Citrix thin client terminals. This infrastructure build supported the subsequent consolidation of all 850 users into a single Active Directory and migration to the new Office 365 productivity suite.

2.   Alpha Server Replacement

This phase of the project was the most complex, technically challenging and high risk as it involved migrating from the TRU64 operating system to HP-UX, moving to Integrity RX2800 servers, setting up a high availability cluster configuration of the HP-UX servers and upgrading ERP databases to the latest version. Downtime of the system simply was not an option and had to be performed through the Christmas shutdown.

"Against the backdrop of these complexities the project was delivered on time, resulting in the Unison System now running on fully supported hardware, operating system and database, ensuring its continued support and operation for the next number of years until an eventual migration to the group ERP system," said Mr O'Neill.

3.   Disaster Recovery Solution

The business already had a robust disaster recovery solution in place with HP DR Services but it was based on tape. Following initial workshops, Grafton identified the advantage of utilising a single backup software solution for both the VMware and HP-UX environments. The solution chosen was based on a StoreOnce disk based device, synchronised to a second device at Grafton's secondary disaster recovery site.

"This gave us vastly improved recovery times and addressed the need to improve the Recovery Time Objective and Recovery Point Objective significantly," explained Mr Scannell. "We were now able to provide the resilience and security required by the business.

"The project was never about cutting costs or improving return on investment. However, by replacing our existing infrastructure with the latest equipment and operating systems we have been able to significantly reduce support costs to the extent that this project is cost neutral over a four-year period," he concluded.

Grafton Merchanting recently won a coveted Real IT Award, in recognition of the company's corporate IT leadership and vision.

For more information on MJ Flood Technology solutions, please contact Pat O'Neill, enterprise consultant at poneill@mjf.ie or visit www.mjf.ie

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