UK Fine Art Logistics Company

Using the cloud to keep their data secure

IT has been instrumental in enabling a specialised logistics company to grow its business and handle the increasingly complex needs of its customers. To improve data security, they chose a managed cloud service from Fordway to provide their specialised applications to virtualised desktops, with 24x7 monitoring and support and a fully managed DR service.

At a Glance

Industry: Logistics

Solution(s):

- Infrastructure as a Service
- Desktop as a Service

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- Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere access for all authorised staff (full Desktop and Infrastructure delivered "as a Service")
- Any document, Any device, Any printer now available for all across the entire company
- Daily data backups replicated to the company's backup site
- Disaster recovery plan implemented
- Fordway 24x7 Service Desk support and monitoring
- Full Cloud deployment (options presented were assessed by client, who chose Private Cloud as best solution for their needs).

The company specialises in the packing, handling, worldwide transportation, installation and storage of high-value items and operates two state-of-the-art storage and warehousing facilities. IT has been instrumental in helping it grow the business and provide accurate and automated information on stored items.

The company has invested substantially in developing its software. This includes a CAD-based application, a project management system, and inventory and collection management databases which use barcodes to track each item, produce forms and other documentation and hold financial records.

The business need: improved data security and disaster recovery

With the company's increased dependence on IT, its operations director had two big concerns. The first was data security: although data was protected by the company's firewall, he was worried about network access.

The second was disaster recovery (DR). In the event of a fire or other issue, it would take the company at least two weeks to rebuild its servers from back-up tapes. "A large amount of our business is logistics, and all the paperwork is held on our IT systems," he explained. "If we couldn't access our servers, activities would quickly grind to a halt."

After researching cloud, the operations director realised that it offered a potential solution to both problems. Data stored in the cloud would be safer because he could take advantage of the state-of-the-art security solutions used by cloud providers, and DR would no longer be an issue because staff could access data from any location. He also identified Fordway as a potential supplier. "When I looked at what they'd done I thought they seemed pretty impressive," he said. "I read their White Papers and then invited them in to find out what they could offer."

Fordway suggested a managed cloud solution that would meet the company's needs and reduce the administrative burden, freeing up in-house time for other activities. The operations director then had to convince senior management that the cloud would keep the company's data secure. "There was a lot of negativity internally, so it was an uphill struggle," he explained. "As my colleagues weren't from an IT background, I had to explain that Fordway's solution would be more secure because our data would be sitting behind a multi-million-pound interface that was much better than anything we could afford for ourselves."

The solution: moving desktops and infrastructure to the cloud

With the move to cloud agreed, Fordway carried out a network assessment to analyse what users were doing and the bandwidth that would be required. They recommended a combination of Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) and Desktop as a Service (DaaS).

There were several advantages to moving both desktops and infrastructure to the cloud. Firstly, users would be unable to store confidential data on their desktops. When they switched on their computer, it would boot directly to the virtual environment, enabling them to access all their applications but not to save data locally. It would also enable staff to work remotely and reduce the bandwidth needed because communications between applications and desktop would take place in Fordway's data centre.

Fordway created a virtual desktop demo to show the operations director how it would work. They then built the virtual environments, remediated all applications and planned the migration. Moving data and standard office applications was straightforward; the biggest challenge was transitioning the bespoke applications. Fordway demonstrated that 3D design using Vectorworks could be carried out in a virtualised environment and solved an issue with print drivers used to track stock in the company's warehouses.

"Fordway carried out a lot of testing to eliminate as many problems as possible before we began the migration. The transition wasn't entirely seamless, and there were a few moments when I wondered if I'd done the right thing, but I'm really glad we persevered. Fordway's engineers were key to the project's success. They were extremely competent and made the whole process a lot less stressful."

The benefits: a flexible infrastructure and increased peace of mind

The solution has successfully delivered the logistics company's two key requirements: security and disaster recovery. Data is held securely at one of Fordway's UK data centres and is snapshotted and replicated to the company's back-up site so it can be restored quickly if required. SLAs have been agreed and are closely monitored by Fordway. If there are any problems at the logistics company's facilities, such as a power cut, staff can log onto their virtual desktop from any location. In the past, users called the operations director about any IT problems. Now they call Fordway's Helpdesk, enabling him to work on other projects. The company pays a monthly 'per user' fee for the complete service.

The biggest benefit is increased peace of mind. "I don't lie awake at night any more wondering what would happen if there was a fire, as I know everything is being continually monitored and our data is safe," the operations director explains.

He's also delighted that sceptical colleagues have begun to admit it was a good move. "For example, we recently opened a new office and warehouse facility. In the past, it was always difficult to get the IT system working in new premises, but this time the IT was the easiest thing to set up!"

The organisation now has a flexible, efficient infrastructure to support continued growth, and can reassure customers that their data is secure, while the in-house operations team can focus on innovating to enhance business revenues without the distraction of routine IT tasks.

"Anyone thinking of moving their systems to the cloud needs to understand that it's not a flick of a switch," the operations director concludes. "However, I recommend going through any pain because the result is definitely worth it."