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> The Warehouse partners with Lexel for virtual desktop solution ('VDI')

One of New Zealand's largest businesses chose to work with Lexel to pilot and launch the country's most ambitious VDI project to date.

SUMMARY

Many New Zealand enterprises aspire to a virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI), because it solves business continuity, remote worker and work-life balance challenges with one disaster-proof solution.

VDI replaces traditional desktop architectures, where every user has their own operating system and applications. Instead, each desktop is hosted and delivered from servers in the data centre. There's really no limit to the number of virtual workplaces (also called containers or virtual machines) that can be implemented this way, and each is customised to the users' needs. Every user can log on to their desktop from anywhere at any time from any internet-connected laptop, desktop or i-phone.

For The Warehouse Group, the move to VDI began life as the 'Virtual Office Project', in response to the need

for a business continuity solution that would also support remote workers. Grant Lang, Infrastructure Architect for The Warehouse Group, chose to work closely with Lexel to make the most appropriate hardware and configuration choices for the pilot project.

"We had the proof of concept sorted out, and then the swine flu' came along, which made the project even more important. Lexel were key in helping us to make the right decisions" said Grant Lang.

After a highly-successful pilot, which had one user saying "If you take this away from us, what will we do?" VDI is now being rolled out to more than 600 team members.



THE CHALLENGE

For Adam Doocey, Infrastructure and Development Manager for The Warehouse Group, the virtual desktop project was an essential part of the company's business continuity plan.

"For the last four years we've been on a disaster recovery journey. At first we needed to ensure that we could get our business systems back up and running in the case of a disaster impacting our primary data centre. Then we started to focus on what would happen if we lost our support office, we quickly realised that production would still be running however our users would not be able to connect. It became a connectivity challenge, as well as a disaster recovery and continuity challenge" said Adam Doocey.

Selecting a hardware supply and advisory partner was a crucial part of the process. To reduce risk, The Warehouse Group decided to leverage their existing relationship with Lexel, who had already demonstrated an impressive ability to identify and solve IT problems for the group.

"Typically a company of our size would use one of the big 3 integrators. Lexel are not in the top 3, however what we like about them is that they take time to listen properly. They don't come along with something to sell you, instead they listen to what you need, they then go away and find the best solution, and that's a massive benefit for us" said Adam Doocey.

LEXEL'S SOLUTION

Working closely with Grant Lang, Lexel contributed to the configuration and validation of the VDI design. This was followed by a proposal outlining the appropriate hardware, storage, licensing and support. With an IT department of around 100, The Warehouse Group was well-equipped to handle the production rollout itself.

"The combination of Lexel's services, my knowledge and our in-house IT resources allowed us to identify and deploy the very latest in networking server hardware, infrastructure and overall solutions" said Grant Lang.

Lexel's recommended solution for The Warehouse Group:

- HP C7000 Blade chassis
- 16x HP Blades
- Solid state hard drives technology used
- 10GB Ethernet technology used
- HP Procurve solution Ethernet switching used end to end
- HP Lefthand SANs
- Citrix XenDesktop for VDI
- Citrix XenApp for application delivery

CONCLUSION

Initially the pilot went live with a pilot group of 30 team members, including project owner Adam Doocey. While it may have been first conceived as a business continuity initiative, the trial quickly revealed that the freedom and flexibility provided by VDI would result in numerous business benefits for The Warehouse Group.

“As part of the pilot we had the pilot team members work from home for a number of days, both planned and unplanned – I was one of them. I got up at the normal time, went through the usual going-to-work ritual, but started work at the time I would usually be leaving the house. I was then able to stop work at school time and take the kids to school – something I don’t usually get to do. It was great, a way to get a life balance while you’re also getting the work done” said Adam Doocey.

Adam continued to say that feedback from team members involved in the pilot was extremely positive. “Life changing” was how one user described VDI.

As well as giving The Warehouse Group team members the ability to work efficiently away from the office, including while they’re overseas on buying trips, VDI has allowed The Warehouse Group to cut costs by prolonging the life of desktop hardware used at Head Office.

“When hardware is decoupled from the user operating system and applications, desktop devices don’t have to be powerful and up-to-date. You can sweat your hardware assets to last up to five years, instead of the usual three” said Noel Simpson - CEO for Lexel.

Another side benefit is the ease of network administration. For example, the ability to install a new application onto the main server, test it on a few users, and then roll it out to the complete user base overnight.

The Warehouse Group is currently in the process of rolling the VDI solution out to more than 600 team members at the Northcote support office, around New Zealand and in Shanghai, China. The infrastructure for the solution sits at an independent Data Centre, with The Warehouse Group - Support Office as the replicated disaster recovery site.

In conclusion, Adam Doocey had this to say about Lexel:

“They listen to us and work with us to find the best solutions. The secret of their success is flexibility and agility.”



KEY BENEFITS OF VDI

- The ability to provide a unique environment for each and every user
- Each of these environments can be completely customized with different applications and settings without impacting other users
- Users can access their desktop from any internet-connected computer at any time
- Network administration is simplified, because new applications can be tested on a trial group before roll-out to the entire user base
- Users' hardware doesn't need to be up-to-date, reducing expenditure on upgrades
- Productivity is protected during pandemics, because users can easily work from home
- Remote access allows companies to offer their employees more flexible work arrangements when required, helping them to achieve a healthier work-life balance

Lexel is a New Zealand owned provider of ICT services and solutions to business. We focus on maximising business performance by using industry leading expertise and solutions to streamline IT infrastructure. Twenty-two years in the IT business, Lexel is a known and trusted partner.

We specialise in providing solution consulting, infrastructure design, implementation, project management, outsourcing, support services and procurement. To allow us to deliver this wide range of services, Lexel Systems has partnered with the main technology providers in New Zealand and we have secured the highest level of certifications possible with each of these partners.