



# GIFT EXPERIENCE FIRM GETS SMART OUT OF THE BOX

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Europe's leading gift business modernized its technology infrastructure to provide greater flexibility and reduce costs





Multichannel retailers require every aspect of their business to be flexible and able to react to changes in the behavior of the customer and the markets they serve, whether it be a physical store, the supply chain, and, more recently, the technology estate. Experience Gift specialist Smartbox, headquartered in Ireland, has modernized its IT infrastructure with a hyperconverged environment, providing the business the ability to mix on-premise and public cloud technology as needed.

Smartbox offers gift boxes and experiences across 11 nations in Europe and distributes over seven million gift experiences a year. “Seventy percent of our revenue comes through traditional retail, and we have three customer types: the gift buyer, the gift beneficiary and the partner providing the gift experience,” says Paul Cash, Director IT Operations at Smartbox. Cash says being an experience gift retailer means Smartbox has to be an event-driven business and have business and technology processes that are able to respond to peaks of activity such as Christmas and Easter.

Cash describes the Smartbox service as “a differentiated product. You get a nice gift box, not just a voucher, and the gift box leads the customer to download an App to begin their gift experience journey.”

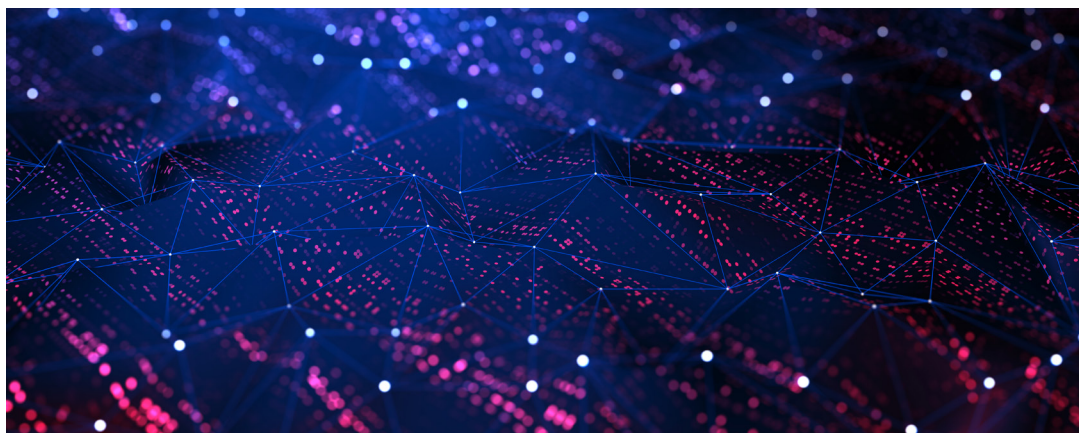
Cash notes that “Smartbox has had organic growth, as well as merger and acquisition growth, and each of those businesses had their own infrastructure, hosting and web stores.”. The scale of the Smartbox operations and its webstores demand several capabilities, including constant uptime, scalability during seasonal peak times, flexibility in development, and tailored experiences to its customers. Cash and the IT team therefore needed to rearchitect the technology to ensure Smartbox had flexibility and robustness.

“The datacenter was set up rapidly as a colocation in Dublin. We had IBM, HP, Dell and VMware in there and a mix of storage,” Cash recalls. To help the stakeholders understand the need to invest in his rearchitecture plans, Cash presented a visual representation of the different technologies in place color coded by age. He then mapped these images to the products and the road map of the business. “Because of the growth of services that Smartbox offers, the datacentre didn’t give us the flexibility the business needed,” Cash says. Like most digital businesses Smartbox needs to frequently release new products as microservices and to provide colleagues with up to the minute data about customers.



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## Modern infrastructure

The Smartbox team invested in a hyperconverged environment that brought together its on-premise IT systems with public cloud services. Using both on-premise and the public cloud is allowing Smartbox to respond to customer and business needs. The modernization provides Smartbox with full visibility across all IT assets and services, advanced data analytics, the ability to control cloud usage, and scale out DevOps development of products.

“Our core applications are in the datacentre, and our web stores (front end) are hosted on AWS to help cope with peaks in demand,” Cash explains. “We have 1,100 host machines on Nutanix Prism Pro and we can move across various tiers, which means there are Apps we can run hot at times of the year and we can easily get more compute when we need it.”

Smartbox chose the mix of on-premise and public cloud for its infrastructure as it gave the organization the choice of using capital expenditure (capex) to invest and not be tied to an operational expenditure (opex) model. Although opex has become more popular among many business technology leaders, for a seasonal business a capex model can be beneficial as it allows investment based on held funds. “Regardless of our future growth or acquisitions we can blend the opex and capex now,” Cash says.

Cash added, “Our previous systems were just not able to support our business vision and something drastic had to be done if we were going to be able to continue to support our business expansion across Europe and ensure customer fulfilment.”

“Nutanix, more than any other partner, has allowed us to get more out of our IT infrastructure, so it can add value to the business. Its solutions have enabled us to take back control of our environment and allowed us to focus on innovation first rather than maintaining a legacy infrastructure.”

In the last 18 months Smartbox has adopted Nutanix AHV, the virtualization tool, which has both allowed it to reduce its datacenter footprint and provided it with enhanced flexibility. The Beam tool is also being used to keep public cloud costs in check - which often was 30 to 40 percent higher than budgeted prior to the deployment. With Beam, the IT team can now utilize a cost-based model to show departments the actual footprint and cost of running application environments and the IT they consume.

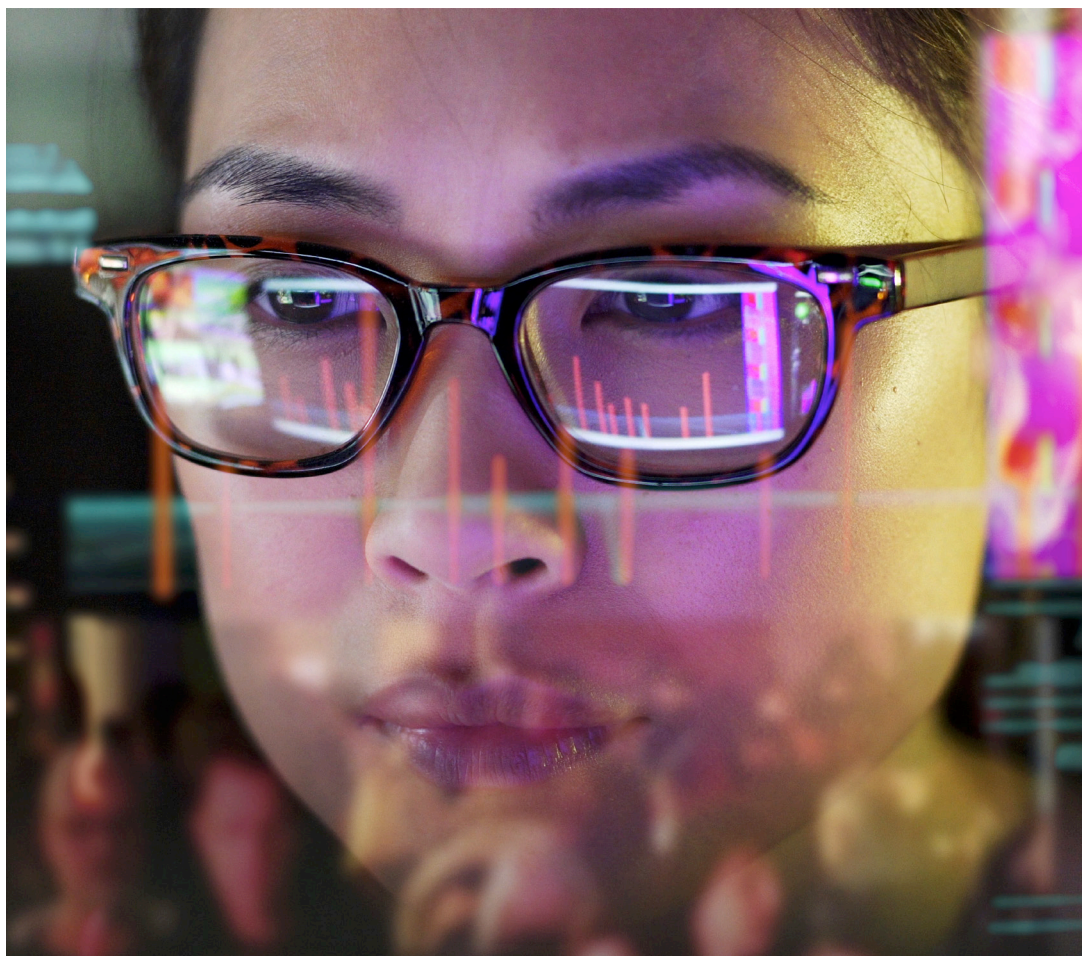




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## Team and Security

In the last decade Dublin has become a tech powerhouse and Smartbox is competing with the likes of Facebook and global banks for technology talent. Cash, like so many technology leaders, says recruiting and retaining talent is one of his main challenges.

“Dublin is getting hard to attract and retain in, but we do have a healthy mix of European and South American talent in the team. Our office is close to the city centre, so that helps. Training is key, as it keeps people interested and fresh and it is a big part of retention,” Cash says.



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