Computer Service Centre runs its cloud services platform on Nutanix for scale, resilience, simplicity and growth

INDUSTRY
Managed Service Provider

BUSINESS NEED
To reduce infrastructure complexity, scale for growth, accelerate customer on-boarding and provide higher performance and resilience service levels, deploy infrastructure that maximises their ability to offer competitively priced managed services

SOLUTION
Nutanix AOS and AHV virtualization

CHALLENGES
- Scale out infrastructure for thousands for VMs
- Rapid customer set up
- Simplified management
- Improved service levels
- Clear technology roadmap
- Improved go to market propositions

CHALLENGE

Computer Service Centre is a UK Managed Service Provider with hundreds of customers on its cloud services platform. Based in Norwich, its UK and European clients range from owner managed services businesses to large multi-branch professional practices and the highly data intensive sustainable energy market. Computer Service Centre's bespoke services support customer workloads that range in size from tens of gigabytes to ingesting, processing, storing and protecting hundreds of terabytes of telemetry and power generation data from wind farms.

The company found that, as it scaled, its IT infrastructure started to impact operations and service delivery speeds. Deploying additional clusters of its old technology stack meant customers were taking three months to onboard and there was a growing risk of poor performance and downtime.

Its existing infrastructure was a large collection of technologies based on Microsoft Hyper-V and an eclectic mix of hardware and software each with unique support and operational needs.

"Being a Managed Service Provider, each time we won a new client, the provisioning time to expand our systems and get some scale was a minimum of three months to acquire, install and make a new cluster with more capacity production ready," says Christopher Cooper, co-founder of Computer Service Centre.

Once installed, day to day operations were becoming resource heavy and overly complex. Computer Service Centre was operating nine separate Hyper-V clusters with four nodes on each. Each cluster was using industry standard servers, dedicated storage (SAN) and networking infrastructure.

As a result, it began to experience a growing number of issues around common operational tasks like patch management, software updates and fault detection.

"We were always months behind on patches because it was a huge effort trying to align all the different vendors. It was a continuous struggle," says Christopher.

In the highly competitive Managed Service Provider market this was not a challenge it could afford. Two years ago, Computer Service Centre won a large account for which it had to build hundreds of virtual machines.

When it examined the requirement, it recognised that it faced a choice of either carrying on expanding its existing complex infrastructure stack or looking to the future of the business.

"We simply couldn't see how we could easily scale. We asked ourselves, are we going to mature as a company and 'get real' about hosting, or are we going to just carry on expanding our infrastructure team to manage our data centres?"

After a detailed evaluation - with Nutanix partner, Softcat - and working directly with Nutanix, the company opted to engage and build its future on Nutanix's hyperconverged infrastructure. As an intelligent customer whose business is based on understanding the cost of goods for service provision, Computer Service Centre found working with Softcat and directly with Nutanix account managers to be exceptional when compared to previous experiences with other vendors and reseller partners. "Even when we were being demanding they answered all our questions and were responsive and fully engaged until the negotiations reached a satisfactory conclusion."

RESULTS

The company started by putting new customers onto Nutanix and, as its existing hardware reached end of life, it migrated existing customers onto the Nutanix hyperconverged platform.

For its internal IT function and customer satisfaction the results were astonishing. "From a build and deploy perspective Nutanix is simple to understand," Christopher says. "We are confident we could double or treble the infrastructure under management without having to expand our infrastructure team. So, for example when deploying additional nodes in response to demand it improves our profitability from both a cost and revenue perspective."

Nutanix has played a major part in presenting Computer Service Centre as a serious cloud services proposition when competing against other providers. The company is now running hundreds of virtual machines for an expanding number of clients supporting 3,500 users in around 500 locations, across the UK and into Europe.

For day to day operations clients are getting improved service levels and the simplified infrastructure and easier operations have enabled Computer Service Centre to offer new services and maintain very competitive prices.

One example of the new services enabled by Nutanix is in disaster recovery. Computer Service Centre has introduced a 15- minute triage system which in the event of server failure provides the option of an attempted fix or reverting to working a point-in-time snapshot.

Previously, when a system went down root cause analysis and restoration of services was a long process. Now, with triage, when a critical call comes in, the client is offered a clear choice; try to repair or revert to a previously known working state... It is a customer led choice to lose a small amount of data or keep the server online and try to repair it. When clients want to get back online quickly by using Nutanix storage snapshots, they understand what they are getting because, as Christopher says "with Nutanix, it just works."

"From a business perspective what Nutanix allowed us to do was go further with the simplification of our different offers in business continuity and disaster recovery. Customers can clearly see what they are buying. Nutanix has allowed us to further productise what we do so that we can be extremely clear with the customers. As a Managed Service Provider, this is vital.

NUTANIX™

We are in a market where we compete with the largest tech companies in the world and with local and national rivals. Thanks to Nutanix we are in a great place to grow profitability while improving customer service without the cost and complexities of taking on more SAN-based clusters."

Since deploying Nutanix node-based clusters, Computer Service Centre took a business decision not to continue opex spending on extended warranties on existing Hyper-V cluster stacks, but instead decided on further capital investment in new Nutanix nodes.

"Some clusters needed extra capacity because of new sales wins. The choice was either keep alive old clusters with extended warranties on different pieces of kit at a cost of tens of thousands of pounds, or buy more Nutanix nodes. We elected to spend on new Nutanix nodes. We are accelerating the retirement of the old clusters. The benefits of Nutanix justified the capital investment over opex investment on existing infrastructure."

Computer Service Centre has migrated the majority of its customers to new Nutanix clusters.

"We stripped it all out, apart from one two-year-old clusters, and we're delighted with the decision. We saw we could double or treble the infrastructure under management without having to expand our infrastructure team. It is easy to get the scalability that we need. I'd love to build an entire data centre with Nutanix and then fill it up, but we are demand driven. The benefit is that we can satisfy that demand easily, simply and quickly with Nutanix."

The Nutanix licensing model aligns with this. Because it is over three to five years, Computer Service Centre is totally aligned with its customer base which makes forecasting and planning a much easier journey.

On the support front Computer Service Centre says Nutanix partners and engineers are unmatched.

"We are very happy with Nutanix because they respond in a timely manner. Because we're deploying Nutanix as a Managed Service Provider it is different from being an internal IT operation. Nutanix is exceptional in understanding our business, our internal IT needs and our different customer use case requirements. They have our needs in focus and serve both markets very well."

This reinforces the recognition on both sides that the business relationship is not purely transactional. As Computer Service Centre grows its cloud business, the requirement for additional infrastructure will expand.

NEXT STEPS

Thanks to its clear technology roadmap Computer Service Centre is exploring additional Nutanix solutions in order to deepen its relationship as it expands its customer offerings.

It is exploring the use of VDI desktop solution Frame. Christopher sees the advantage of a VDI offerings to replace terminal server deployments and plans to use Frame.

As a member of the Nutanix Innovation Council Computer Service Centre has direct access to Nutanix senior management and provides feedback to the company on its technology and services. It has found Nutanix is open to listening.

The company also plans to continue on-board more Nutanix nodes. Computer Service Centre has been in business for over 20 years and has grown every year. Says Christopher: "We love delivering tech and, as a future focused tech company, we're hoping with Nutanix we have created a virtuous circle that will accelerate our growth."

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T. 855.NUTANIX (855.688.2649) | F. 408.916.4039
info@nutanix.com | www.nutanix.com | @nutanix