

Forward thinking accountancy firm finds freedom from legacy constraints with Nutanix

Mercer & Hole transforms IT Infrastructure with Nutanix Enterprise Cloud and AHV Hypervisor to realise both immediate and long-term business benefits

BUSINESS NEED

A top accountancy firm in the UK, Mercer & Hole, was looking for a completely new solution for its IT with a hybrid cloud-based IT infrastructure.

They required a solution that delivered immediate scalability, high availability and ease of management benefits as well as future-proofing the firm's IT going forward. This was possible by migrating to a Nutanix Enterprise Cloud and workload virtualisation using the Nutanix AHV hypervisor.

“The Nutanix Enterprise Cloud has given us an easy to manage, self-healing and scalable platform that's fit for purpose and a digital future.”

– Phil Fenn, Audit and Business Advisory Partner, Mercer & Hole

INDUSTRY

Accountancy

BENEFITS

- Immediate boost to on-premise performance and capacity with same on-demand scalability as the Cloud
- 90% reduction in power overheads through dramatically smaller rack footprint
- Rock solid business continuity through data replication to offsite DR system plus automated Veeam backup
- Full virtualisation of previously physical server workloads using Nutanix AHV hypervisor
- Hybrid-ready on-premise infrastructure to service future plans for Cloud adoption

SOLUTION

- Nutanix Enterprise Cloud
- Prism management plane
- AHV hypervisor
- Veeam Backup

APPLICATIONS

- CCH Practice Management system
- Microsoft SQL Server
- Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops

CHALLENGE

Accountancy firm, Mercer & Hole, is a forward-thinking organisation and fully aware of the importance of technology in the delivery of a high level of service to its clients. With this in mind the business had already upgraded its telephone and connectivity systems and was now reviewing how it could update its legacy IT infrastructure.

Joining Mercer & Hole at a time of growth, IT Manager, Craig Sparkes, explained that although the legacy systems were reliable, he faced several challenges with the infrastructure. The large stack of servers gave physical limitations due to the space needed and there were also constraints about what could be achieved in terms of automation. A great deal of his time was being spent managing the infrastructure and dealing with maintenance tasks. A key objective was to introduce a modern infrastructure so that some of this work could be automated as Craig's vision was that his team moved towards becoming 'enablers' within the business to change the method of service delivery with a more proactive IT service.

Audit and Business Advisory Partner Phil Fenn commented "We realised that our IT infrastructure needed replacing to provide a solid platform for growth and new working practices. Less clear, was which of the many alternatives would both suit our immediate requirements and enable us to keep pace with fast moving digital technologies, such as the Cloud, to progress the business going forward. We found a wide range of views about suitability and each option had strong advocates!"

SOLUTION

Phil Fenn and Craig Sparkes decided to collaborate with specialist help with this business-critical decision, instructing system integrator Total Computers to review the company's IT requirements and work with them to formulate detailed plans for transformation.

As part of that brief Total was asked to look at migration to the Cloud as a possible approach, but this was quickly dismissed, as Paolo Rodia, Business Development Manager at Total, explains

"Although Mercer & Hole expect the Cloud to play a significant role in future plans, its SQL-based application base made immediate migration unworkable. Moreover, with another office near to the data centre, we felt it could comfortably address business continuity and management issues using hyper-converged Nutanix infrastructure while still achieving the same kind of on-demand scalability as the Cloud."

The ability to virtualise workloads using the Nutanix AHV hypervisor - included at no extra cost as part of the Enterprise Cloud solution - was another key selling point. As was the ability to integrate with Azure, AWS and other services to, in the fullness of time, build a hybrid cloud solution.

All of which led to an order for two Nutanix Enterprise Cloud clusters. One to replace the legacy servers in the main St Albans data centre, the other to go in the nearby Milton Keynes office to provide much-needed real time replication and rapid disaster recovery capabilities.

CLIENT OUTCOME

Following installation of the two clusters by Nutanix, staff from Total Computers worked with Mercer & Hole to virtualise and transform the legacy servers into 65 VMs in record time. These virtual machines host all of the workloads behind the main practice management system and in supporting Microsoft SQL databases, plus the company's end user computing solution, used by over 200 staff and delivered using Citrix Virtual Apps and Desktops software.

Total also configured replication to the DR cluster in Milton Keynes which, together with automated snapshots and Veeam powered backup, provides complete peace of mind when it comes to business continuity.

Included within the project plan was an upgrade to Microsoft 365 during the migration and, even with this additional requirement the entire project was completed in a matter of weeks.

“Not only was it very quick but, once done, it just worked very well,” commented IT Manager, Craig Sparkes. “Best of all the Nutanix Enterprise Cloud is virtually self-healing, which means less time fixing problems and more time working on projects of real benefit to the business.”

Performance and capacity have been significantly enhanced, too, providing easily scaled headroom to cope with future growth and the adoption of new digital technologies. Added to which, by slimming down from 30+ physical servers to a pair of 2U appliances, the company has immediately reduced its energy bills by around 90%.

NEXT STEPS

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the firm’s partners and employees moved to homeworking. The agile Nutanix infrastructure means the team at Mercer & Hole have all been able to work remotely and continue to meet their clients’ needs – just as the accountancy team would be able to in an office setting.

Mercer & Hole is now looking at further IT developments to maintain the firm’s high level of client service. The adoption of SharePoint Online, as part of its Microsoft 365 deployment, is one such move and part of their long-term plans to build a resilient, hybrid infrastructure aimed at enhancing employee productivity.

“It’s not just the immediate benefits of having a self-healing, secure and easy to manage infrastructure,” said Audit and Business Advisory Partner, Phil Fenn, “we also value the ability to move seamlessly into the Cloud at some point and make full use of the latest digital technologies to deliver the very best value to our clients.”



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