Miller Insurance Services LLP upgrades network and storage for new office

Straightforward migration and performance boost

Objective
Replace network and storage due to new office move

Approach
Issued separate tenders for network and storage

IT Matters
- Consolidated servers, shrinking the space required from 15 racks to only 5, thus saving on power, space and cost
- Increased storage performance, speeding up an overnight batch process by nearly 40 per cent
- Implemented network access management to provide extra security

Business Matters
- Ensured smooth migration, with all staff able to start work on Monday morning at new office with minimal disruption
- Enabled straightforward integration of extra people following a merger
- Provided capacity for future expansion, with spare space at data centre, and future-proof features such as software-defined networking

When Miller Insurance Services LLP moved its head office to a new building, it needed to replace its network and storage, and decided to move its in-house data centre to a hosted suite. Using HPE equipment for this has delivered performance increases, saved space, and provided a reliable end-to-end solution.

Challenge

Office move
Miller Insurance Services LLP is a specialist wholesale insurance broker, operating internationally and has more than 600 employees, with headquarters in London and four international offices.

When the lease was coming to an end at its London head office, the company decided to move to a new headquarters. It chose to take the first six floors of a shared building, and started to plan how its IT systems needed to adapt to the move.

The move also raised another question: what to do with the in-house data centre that was located in the previous office?

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"We looked at various options, but we decided that to simplify the move of staff to the new location, it would be best to shift the data centre to a hosted data centre suite in London's Docklands before changing offices," said Gary Williams, technical architect at Miller Insurance Services LLP.

Effectively, two projects were rolled into one: new equipment for the new office, and the move of the in-house data centre to a hosted location. Miller issued a tender for the networking, and also issued a second tender to replace its existing storage as part of the move.

Solution

Cost-effective, capable solution

"We engaged external consultants to help us with the LAN tender, and we compared proposals based on Cisco and Hewlett Packard Enterprise technology – we were looking for an end-to-end networking solution from a single vendor, including the LAN and Wi-Fi," says Williams. "We chose to work with HPE and its partner Pervasive Networks for both the networking and the storage, as well as to buy new HPE servers.

"When it came down to it, the Cisco and HPE solutions basically had the same capabilities, but the pricing and support of the HPE equipment was much more cost-effective than Cisco," explained Williams.

"Pervasive came back with an excellent tender response, and we were also influenced by our experience of having had an HPE network for the past five years – which had been very robust with no issues, and with very low cost maintenance."

HPE provided a full end-to-end networking solution, including a local area network (LAN) for the new office, a LAN for the hosted data centre, and Wi-Fi for the office and for all of Miller's international offices. For networking, the international offices use HPE 5400 Switch Series and HPE 3800 Switch Series.

The solution includes 2,000 edge ports, 500 to 600 data centre ports, and wireless 802.11ac access points, as well as HPE Intelligent Management Center (IMC) software. It also provides support for Cisco Jabber telephony for 600 users.

Miller's London headquarters has been equipped with HPE 10508 Switches and HPE 5412R Switches. At the data centre itself, HPE has supplied fourteen HPE 5900 Switch Series. For storage, HPE has provided an HPE 3PAR StoreServ 7400 4-node Storage with 150TB capacity, which is located at the data centre.

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Williams explains, "We chose to move the data centre to simplify the transition to the new office, and to give us better capabilities for future expansion to cope with business growth – the room we have is half-full at present, so we have the space to double the amount of kit."

Miller also recently completed a transaction with Willis Group Holdings, bringing extra requirements for the new system. Williams comments, "Originally, we planned to leave floor one in the new building empty for future expansion – now, we have already filled it with staff transferred from Willis to Miller."

Trouble-free migration

The LAN and storage solutions were implemented by Pervasive Networks, who now also provide a fully managed service to look after Miller's network, as well as 24x7 support with a four-hour response time. As part of the office move, HPE Technology Services helped to migrate data for Miller's physical servers.

"Five hundred Miller staff stopped working at 12.30pm on Friday, and at 9am on Monday they all started again in the new office," said Williams. "Everything just worked, with very few support calls and no major issues.

"For the data centre, the staff mostly weren't even aware when we migrated the virtual systems while they were using them, and we moved the physical systems over a few weekends," continues Williams. "The storage migration also went smoothly with no issues, and was completed ahead of schedule."

Benefits

Unified network management

While Pervasive provides a fully-managed service for the network, Miller still uses HPE IMC, which provides 'bring your own device' (BYOD) and network access management features, also enabling unified management of wired and wireless networks from a single console.

"As well as managing the Wi-Fi users, we use IMC to give us read-only access to the configuration of the switches and other hardware – it gives us a graphical, traffic light view so we can see if there are any issues," says Williams. "I also use HPE 3PAR management tools to manage our storage."

Network access management provides the capability to segment users based on their devices and their access rights, and thus assuring Quality of Service. For the Wi-Fi, it gives Miller an extra level of security, with authentication at the device level ensuring that visitors will not have access to the corporate network.

Miller is currently piloting a BYOD programme, which allows its staff to use their own iPhones®, iPads® and certain Android devices. Williams comments, "We have the infrastructure in place already to manage corporate iPhones, so it's fairly easy to offer BYOD."

The new network has software-defined networking (SDN) capabilities, ensuring it is future-proofed with features that Miller may require further down the road.

Customer at a glance

Hardware
- HPE 3800, 5400, 5412R, 5500, 5900 and 10508 Switches
- HPE ProLiant DL385p Gen8 server
- HPE 3PAR StoreServ 7400 4-node Storage
- HPE wired-wireless access points

Software
- HPE Intelligent Management Center

HPE services
- Data migration by HPE Technology Services

"Before the recent move we were still using 15 or 20 racks – now, our hosted suite in the data centre fits everything into only five racks, saving space and money."

– Gary Williams, technical architect, Miller Insurance Services LLP

Performance and connectivity

"The network performance, and the connectivity between the office and the data centre, are both really good," says Williams. "Having the new network in the data centre allowed us to go to 10Gbps for certain services where they were previously 1Gbps."

This has enabled Miller to increase the bandwidth to its VMware hosts, which allows it to run more virtual machines on the physical HPE servers. Williams comments, "This means I need less hardware – and the new HPE servers have also got four or five times the capacity of the previous machines.

"When I joined Miller in 2002, we had 50 or 60 racks in our computer room," says Williams. "That shrunk over the years, but before the recent move we were still using 15 or 20 racks – now, our hosted suite in the data centre fits everything into only five racks, saving space and money."

Miller also saves space with the HPE 3PAR storage. According to Williams, the 3PAR has twice the capacity of his previous system, while only taking half the floor space.

"The 3PAR is a great piece of kit, and has given us a massive boost in performance," says Williams. "For example, we run an overnight batch process starting at 8pm that needs to be finished by 5.30am – on the old system it usually went to 5am and sometimes ran over that time, so it would fail."

"When we moved the process to the 3PAR, it runs on the SSD, one of the three tiers of storage in the system," continues Williams. "The process now finishes at 1.30am, so we've saved three and a half hours – nearly 40 per cent."

Network 'just works'

With the move to the new office and the data centre migration complete, Miller now has the network and storage it needs for the foreseeable future. Williams comments, "It's business as usual for now, but I undertake an annual global infrastructure review, which will enable me to produce a report with any recommendations for next year.

"Reliability has been good, and our account manager at Pervasive is really responsive – he always gets back to us when he says he will," says Williams. "The network just works – it's there in the background, and everyone has connectivity."

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