



How Softcat helped Heathcote group build a network fit for growth

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Heathcote Holdings is a family owned UK group of complementary, innovative and customer centric businesses operating across recycling, waste management, organics, plant hire, agriculture and land management.

Founded on strong family values and an entrepreneurial spirit, the group is led by Chairman Trevor Heathcote, with sons Martin and Nathan playing key roles in shaping its future. Employing more than 1,000 people across over 30 owned sites, Heathcote Holdings generates approximately £174 million in turnover and handles around 1.94 million tonnes of waste each year. The group is committed to enabling the circular economy, delivering sustainable solutions that meet today's needs without compromising the needs of tomorrow, while placing environmental responsibility, customer service and long term relationships at the core of everything it does.

A key part of the group is Countrystyle Recycling Limited, founded in 1996 and now one of the UK's leading independent waste management and recycling businesses. Operating primarily across London, the South East and East Anglia, Countrystyle manages around one million tonnes of waste per annum and provides comprehensive collection, recycling and recovery services for local authorities and commercial customers. With a modern fleet, purpose built facilities and advanced recycling capabilities, Countrystyle plays a central role in Heathcote Holdings' end to end circular economy model and its continued operational growth.

Key Facts

1 Family owned UK group with 1,000+ staff across 30+ sites, specialising in recycling, waste management, agriculture, plant hire and land management

2 Processes 1.94 million tonnes of waste annually, supporting a circular economy

3 Countrystyle Recycling alone manages one million tonnes of waste yearly across London, the South East, and East Anglia

The Challenge

When Blair Ogilvie joined Heathcote Holdings as Group IT Director in early 2024, he inherited an IT environment that reflected the group's historic operating model. Each business within the group functioned independently, with its own infrastructure, suppliers and standards. As Blair explained, "each company had their own IT setup and was managed by a different IT company. We needed to build firmly established links and a truly centralised IT department that can scale with the business and its ambitions".

Network reliability was one of the most pressing issues. Within the Countrystyle part of the group in particular, internet outages occurred so often it became the status quo and the business began operating around them. Connectivity was being lost once or twice a week for extended periods, yet the incumbent provider maintained that this was an unavoidable limitation of the existing environment. Blair recalled that "the Countrystyle network was deemed acceptable despite internet outages once or twice a week", a position he strongly disagreed with given the business's growing reliance on cloud-based systems.

Network reliability emerged as a significant consideration. In the Countrystyle division, internet outages occurred periodically, which led to less efficient workarounds to key processes. Connectivity was occasionally lost once or twice a week for extended periods, and the incumbent provider viewed this as a limitation of the existing environment and the cost to replace would be untenable. Blair noted

that "the Countrystyle network had grown to be tolerated despite internet outages once or twice a week. This was the most immediate issue I wanted to fix to support our increased use of cloud based applications".

The existing network design and infrastructure presented some challenges, with switches and access points not always optimally positioned, leading to variable WiFi coverage across operational sites. As Heathcote continued its modernisation efforts, transitioning from paper based processes to tablets and app based systems aimed at enhancing efficiency, accuracy and traceability, it became clear that improvements to the network would be needed to further support these advancements "Countrystyle had moved to an app based and tablet system for vehicle inspections and these had to be done before employees leave the yard. However, there was no strong WiFi coverage to facilitate this," Blair explained.

For Blair, the challenge was not only technical but strategic. Only a few months into the role, he needed to develop and present a plan for a major network refresh, whilst also setting the foundations for a long term, group wide IT strategy. "Three months into the job and I'm asking for the largest investment into IT in the group's history. This couldn't be put to the board without a really robust justification and plan." he said. Building a clear, credible business case that linked infrastructure investment to operational efficiency and future growth was essential.

Critical Success Factors

A highly reliable network capable of supporting business critical and app based workflows without regular outages

Centralised management and visibility to support a maturing, group wide IT function

A strong, defensible business case that aligned technology investment with operational efficiency and long term strategy

The Solution

Heathcote Holdings engaged Softcat to help assess the existing environment and design a networking strategy that could support both immediate operational needs and the group's longer term IT ambitions.

Blair had worked with Softcat previously and trusted the team to take a consultative approach rather than simply recommending a like for like hardware refresh. From the outset, Softcat focused on understanding how the business was evolving and how technology could enable that change.

A core part of the engagement was recognising that the network refresh would underpin a wider programme to consolidate and mature IT across the group. With 14 to 15 companies historically operating independently, Blair was in the process of bringing IT in house and standardising platforms wherever possible. "We now have an internal Heathcote IT team. We don't outsource the main IT support anymore. We manage the whole group's IT now," he explained. Softcat worked closely with Blair to design a solution that could be deployed consistently across sites, whilst remaining flexible enough to meet different operational requirements.

Softcat explored multiple networking platforms with Heathcote, providing clear guidance on the strengths and trade offs of each option. Blair's previous experience with Meraki, combined with Softcat's technical input, led to the selection of a Meraki based architecture. The platform's centralised management and visibility aligned closely with Heathcote's goal of running IT as a single, cohesive group function.

To ensure the design was both effective and cost efficient, Softcat recommended carrying out full wireless site surveys at key Countrystyle locations. While initially sceptical, Blair later recognised their value. "I honestly

thought that was just trying to upsell, but it paid for itself ten times over," he said. The surveys revealed that the walls were significantly thinner and by optimising placement and antenna design, Heathcote was able to reduce hardware volumes and therefore hardware costs by around 60%.

Softcat also supported Blair in building a comprehensive internal business case. This included cost analysis, risk reduction and future scalability, helping to clearly articulate the operational and financial benefits of the proposed solution. As a result, the Heathcote board approved the largest single IT investment the group had made to date.

Implementation was delivered through a hybrid model. Softcat's Professional Services team led the deployment of core firewalls and switches at major sites, working out of hours to avoid disruption. Blair contrasted this with a previous firewall replacement that had caused five days of downtime, noting that this time there was "not a single minute of downtime in operational hours". Heathcote's internal IT team then rolled out access points and firewalls at smaller sites, supported by knowledge transfer from Softcat.

Alongside networking, the standardised platform has enabled Heathcote to progress broader consolidation initiatives, including unifying Microsoft 365 email and advancing its telephony strategy with Softcat's support. Together, these changes are creating a consistent, scalable IT foundation for the group.

Solution Highlights

Cisco Meraki network architecture providing centralised management and visibility across multiple sites

Comprehensive wireless site surveys that optimised design and reduced unnecessary hardware spend by 60%

Hybrid delivery model combining Softcat Professional Services with in house IT capability

The Benefits

The most immediate benefit of the new network was a dramatic improvement in reliability. Regular outages were eliminated, providing a stable platform for business critical systems and removing a long standing operational risk. In locations with limited or no mobile coverage, reliable WiFi has become essential to keeping operations running smoothly.

Crucially, the improved network has enabled Heathcote to accelerate its transition to more digital, efficient ways of working. With consistent coverage across operational areas, the business has been able to move away from paper based processes and adopt tablets and app driven systems at scale. Device usage on the network has more than doubled as a result. "We're now averaging nearly two and a half to three thousand devices on the same network, because we've gone a lot more digital," Blair explained, adding that "they now do all the checks digitally rather than paper based". He noted that the new network

"allowed us to digitalise a lot of systems that we wouldn't have been able to before".

From a financial perspective, the detailed design work ensured Heathcote invested where it mattered most. By reducing the number of access points, while improving coverage, funds were redirected towards higher spec firewalls and switches, delivering better long term value. Blair reflected: "Without the wireless surveys, the business would have spent significantly more money on APs that we didn't actually need".

The successful delivery of the project has also strengthened IT's position within the business. Completing a complex transformation with no disruption during operational hours built confidence in the newly formed internal IT team and created momentum for future initiatives as Heathcote continues to mature its group wide IT strategy.

Benefits at a Glance

Eliminated recurring network outages and improved operational reliability

Enabled a successful transition from paper based to digital, app driven processes

Provided a scalable foundation for consolidated, group wide IT operations

Why Softcat

For Heathcote Holdings, Softcat stood out for its partnership led approach and strategic support. Reflecting on the engagement, Blair highlighted the value Softcat added beyond pure technology delivery, noting that "Softcat supported us significantly in how we created that business plan internally and helped us demonstrate the benefits and the cost analysis in a way that made sense to the business".

Blair also valued the openness and trust built through day to day collaboration, noting that "Our Account Manager Josh is honest. I can rely on him to be upfront and transparent. This is always beneficial because we can make properly informed decisions". Alongside this, Blair pointed to the depth of specialist expertise available within Softcat, adding, "We get access to a wealth of specialists within Softcat, like our Network and Security Specialist Charlie Birchall. There are numerous scenarios where I want Charlie's opinion on things, because he's earned our trust". Blair also praised the commitment shown during delivery, recalling how Softcat engineers "worked with us until about 11 o'clock that night, to make sure everything was running". As Heathcote continues to invest in IT and raise expectations around performance and reliability, Blair values Softcat as a trusted partner that consistently stands up when it matters most.