

BERRY BROS. & RUDD POPS THE CORK ON NEW INFRASTRUCTURE

Cloud & managed services



Datacentre



Berry Bros. & Rudd are Britain's oldest wine and spirit merchant, stocking over 4,000 wines and honoured with two Royal Warrants for H.M. The Queen and H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. With over 315 years of history they have become synonymous with knowledge and unsurpassed levels of customer service. Still located at No. 3 St James's Street London where the business began in 1698, and home to their eight Masters of Wine they now also enjoy operations in Basingstoke, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore and employ over 300 staff.

The Challenge

While traditions are valued, the firm embraces progress, and this was the driving force behind its belief that moving away from its original on-premise IT infrastructure might be the key to the levels of performance and resilience they desired to support their business.

Paul Slade, Infrastructure Manager at Berry Bros. & Rudd elaborates, "We had successfully deployed a virtual infrastructure which at the time was cutting edge, but in the five years that had elapsed, technology had moved on massively and it was starting to show signs of its age. Issues over performance and availability were creeping in and presenting a risk to the business."

When this infrastructure was first deployed the business it only had three offices, but now with eight locations across the globe, a team of four supports a workforce of over 300 users for all things IT and telecoms. He continues, "With such a broad spectrum of responsibility we were left with little time for strategy and innovation so offloading a good chunk of the infrastructure management and time consuming, but necessary business as usual tasks, had great appeal."

After initially exploring some of the options from large mainstream suppliers, Berry Bros. & Rudd were not convinced of the service options available. Keen to work with a provider that would offer a bespoke service they explained their challenges to longstanding partner Softcat for their input into a possible infrastructure move. "Whilst their managed services business was immature, they had some good clients and we felt their approach to the market was right. All in all, they had the potential to be a good fit for us."

Nick Baron, Managed Service Specialist at Softcat, picks up the story, "There were a number of reasons that made a bespoke managed service a compelling choice for Berry Bros. & Rudd. They wanted to benefit from best practice design standards and have a pool of technical resources they could call on whenever they needed it. Having been frustrated in the past with upgrade projects, a managed service would also ensure they would always be on the latest technology."

Located in the heart of London at historically significant premises also meant the buildings were simply not up to the standards necessary for hosting modern data centre technology. Staying with an on-premise architecture would put great pressure on both the fabric of their offices as well as the IT team trying to negotiate this variable. Conversely, the best-in-class technology that could be put to work for them in the Softcat data centre, would mean a purpose-built facility at their disposal and with it new levels of availability, scalability and flexibility, something they could not hope to achieve through the design and deployment of an on-premise solution.

Furthermore, the decision to review the environment was coinciding with a number of contracts surrounding the WAN infrastructure coming up for renewal. "We believed that we could construct a very favourable commercial deal that would enable Berry Bros. & Rudd to exit almost all of their existing contracts with zero cost of change. Harmonising their circuit and commercials with one provider would make migrating systems on to a new hosted infrastructure easier as they would effectively be 'on net'," explains Nick Barron.

The Solution

Migrating all of the systems in one go to the new infrastructure would be impractical, not least because of the demands it would place on the limited resources of the Berry Bros. & Rudd IT team, so a phased approach was planned starting with the Microsoft Exchange environment and working towards an end game that would eventually see no important IT infrastructure on-premise at their offices.

"Exchange was a critical environment for us as it's probably the most important application we run and integral to the operation of the business. Whilst we were already on the latest version of the software we knew there was a lot more we could do around improving the resilience and availability of the email platform," continues Paul Slade.

Initially, the Exchange environment would be deployed on a shared infrastructure in the Softcat data centre and then moved onto a dedicated platform when the time was right. Nick Barron picks up the story, "Whilst we initially deployed on a shared platform we would migrate onto a dedicated environment in the future. This gave Berry Bros. & Rudd the best commercial terms on day one, plus the flexibility to grow into the service in the future."

As with any project there are always unforeseen issues. True to form snags were hit in the migration process after a firmware bug with one of the Softcat core switches affected the Berry Bros. & Rudd Exchange system for two days. Improvements in procedures and processes were quickly made and the failed equipment replaced, giving Berry Bros. & Rudd confidence that even in the event of a problem, remediation would be swift and effective.

Despite this glitch, the Exchange environment went live on the new hosted platform and has delivered many of the improvements Berry Bros. & Rudd expected with only minimal down time since. "The design of the solution is better than anything we could have come up with independently – incorporating increased resilience and built to a much better standard," claims Paul Slade.

With phase one complete, Berry Bros. & Rudd now embarked on phase two moving the rest of their virtualised servers and file sharing across to the Softcat infrastructure. This would see the switch to the dedicated platform eventually moving to dual redundancy utilising the second Softcat data centre in Manchester.

"The dedicated platform we now have means we have better control over the environment and the costs associated with it. It also allows us access to this environment to make changes ourselves. So if we want to add a new host, more CPU or memory, we can do that easily and quickly and pay the increment in compute cost accordingly," continues Paul Slade.

Alongside the dedicated environment, Berry Bros. & Rudd are now supported by the Softcat account management, helpdesk and engineering teams. In Paul Slade's opinion, it's a relationship built on a true partnership, "I like the fact that I have got to know much of the team personally and genuinely look upon them as an extension of my own resources." Nick Barron echoes this, "Working the way we do with Berry Bros. & Rudd means that we have fostered a strong sense of collaboration between the two teams - if they run out of time on a task then we might pick up the slack, likewise if they have spare capacity they might become more involved in an additional task the Softcat team might otherwise have completed."

This support has been hugely valuable to Berry Bros. & Rudd whilst the process of transitioning all the virtual machines across to the new environment is ongoing. "It's foolish to think you can simply hand over your environment in its entirety to a provider unless you've got really deep pockets! In reality, like us you need to work together with your provider as a partnership and decide which tasks you can realistically hold on to and which tasks you want to hold on to." For example Berry Bros. & Rudd has handed over some responsibility for patching and upgrades to the Softcat team. Conversely they have retained user administration and email routing.

The Benefits

The new environment has led to a host of benefits for Berry Bros. & Rudd. Firstly, they have been able to build their new environment using technology that would not have been available to them on-premise. "Whilst the technology used was not the be all and end all for us, knowing our environment was to be hosted on the latest equipment and designed to the highest possible standards gave us real peace of mind. It also means we will be able to tap into new opportunities like stretch vLAN which we would not have been able to achieve working alone," claims Paul Slade. He continues, "We have less risk on the Exchange environment now and the levels of resilience in play for our whole environment is beneficial to the business."

The service has enabled Berry Bros. & Rudd to mitigate a huge element of risk from its business when compared with continuing a traditional on-premise arrangement. That's the real value comments Paul Slade. "There would have been risk associated with making the migration onto a new system and then there

would be on-going risk surrounding how we would respond and what we could guarantee in the event of the unthinkable occurring. It's conceivable that in a doomsday scenario we might not be able to recover with the systems and resources we would have at our disposal. Now I can offer improved guarantees that tell us what availability we can expect and how quickly we'll be back in business in the event of a disaster."

It is also clear being able to tap into Softcat's resources as an extension of the Berry Bros. & Rudd team has been invaluable. Now instead of employing lots of in-house IT staff they supplement them wherever expertise is required. Likewise, the commitments of the service always ensures that the Berry Bros. & Rudd environment is using the most current technology which means management is straightforward whether conducted by Softcat or the Berry Bros. & Rudd team.

The adoption of the service has also prompted a change in budgeting moving from a capex to an opex model. This provides the ability to forecast what is coming down the line for the next three years and means that budgeting is easier to manage.

Berry Bros. & Rudd believe they now have the best of both worlds and are no longer beholden to their IT infrastructure. "We have the expertise we need when we need it plus access to a dedicated platform which gives us the freedom to add, amend and change as we choose. This is all without the responsibility of ensuring maximum uptime or getting embroiled in many of the time consuming business as usual tasks which can swamp a small team like ours," comments Paul Slade.

Why Softcat?

The personal touch should not be underestimated says Paul Slade. "We deal with real people at Softcat and not some faceless organisation. This breeds ownership and a refreshing level of service excellence that we would not have found working with one of the major managed service providers. I like the 'Softcat way' – it's very similar to our own business philosophy which makes us happy bedfellows!".

Key Facts

- Britain's oldest wine and spirit merchant
- 315 year history
- Two royal warrants
- 4000 wines stocked
- 300 staff across five global locations

Critical Success Factors

- Meet the demands of a growing workforce
- Service increasing number of global locations
- Support a small internal IT resource
- Overcome issues being caused by a legacy on premise solution
- De-risk the provision of IT moving forward
- Mitigate the issues of deploying on site IT in a historic office building

Solutions Highlights

- End-to-end managed infrastructure service
- Consolidation of multiple WAN circuits
- Interchange between shared and dedicated infrastructure
- Two phase approach moving Exchange environment first followed by rest of on- site IT
- Dual data centre redundancy

At a Glance

- Robust SLA's guarantee uptime and service
- State-of-the-art host equipment
- Extensive pool of technical resource on tap
- True working partnership fostered
- Predictable monthly budgeting
- No critical IT on premise any longer
- Freedom to add and change at will