

REAPING THE REWARDS FROM EXPERT ADVICE

Datacentre



Networking & security



Unified communication



Since 1838, The Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) has played a leading role in the development of British agriculture and a vibrant rural economy through the uptake of good science, the promotion of best practice and a coordinated, impartial approach to wide-ranging rural issues. Today RASE's work includes support for business and social welfare in rural communities, education and the Society's famous shows and events.

Since it was set up in 1840, the Society has aimed to support farming and the rural industries by spreading information about the best in research, development and practice. Today, RASE still works to bring the best of British agriculture to the attention of its members and the wider rural industries through shows, events, conferences and awards.

Major relocation project

In May 2009, the RASE moved offices to a new location on the site. Stewart Page, RASE's Assistant Director ICT, contacted Softcat to discuss a restructuring of the network infrastructure. This conversation led to choosing Softcat for the specification, supply and installation of both the VMware and NetApp solutions.

Softcat worked with the IT team and the VoIP vendor to design a robust and resilient solution for the new location, which included a number of fibre links to remote buildings on the site.

"We had known Softcat for years, ever since they helped us rationalise and manage our Microsoft licensing policies," commented Stewart. "Softcat worked with us to implement a new licensing model that ensured RASE adhered to Microsoft's licensing programme, saving us a large amount of money in the process."

Having been impressed with the advice and support delivered by Softcat, Stewart had no hesitation in partnering with them to undertake the IT relocation. "Softcat was our natural first port of call," continued Stewart, "but this project was going to really test Softcat's technicians as we wanted to move out of our old offices on a Friday afternoon and be up and running in our new centre the following Monday morning."

A single point of contact

Matters were compounded by the state of RASE's existing servers, some of which were over 9 years old. Recognising that these might not withstand the relocation and may not be suitable for reconfiguring within the new infrastructure, Stewart began to evaluate alternative technologies, including virtualisation. The Society was concerned about business continuity and disaster recovery and the relocation project gave them the opportunity to implement a fully resilient solution.

"We started looking at various solutions from a range of suppliers," added Stewart. "At the same time we were planning to replace our redundant phone system with VoIP, but when we mentioned our virtualisation plans to Softcat, we realised that in Softcat we had a single partner that could design our overall solution, work with various suppliers, act as our single point of contact and oversee the entire project."

Softcat evaluated RASE's virtualisation, business continuity and disaster recovery objectives and recommended a solution based around NetApp, VMware and HP Servers. Following evaluations and technical discussions, Stewart decided to accept the proposal and engaged Softcat to design, develop and implement the overall solution. "The more we worked alongside Softcat, the more we appreciated the immense technical knowledge and experience they could bring to bear on this project," said Stewart. "They even became involved in the VoIP aspects, working with suppliers and ensuring that the new infrastructure would be able to handle all of our voice and data traffic."

Server implementation in under 15 minutes

With business continuity and disaster recovery high on the list of objectives, Softcat's disaster recovery specialists had proposed a solution based around the NetApp SAN which would eliminate single points of failure across the SAN and allow synchronous replication within the SAN over a data link between two of RASE's buildings, ensuring business continuity in the event of a disaster. "This solution gave us greater resilience in our networks and delivered an elegant and low cost continuity and recovery solution," added Stewart.

Now live, RASE's new IT infrastructure is already delivering the services and capabilities that the Society required. The relocation went smoothly with all networks and systems up and running on the first Monday morning, thanks to the joint efforts of RASE's IT team and Softcat's technicians. The move to virtualisation means that Stewart now spends far less time managing the Society's servers: server maintenance is now a relatively simple and quick operation, servers can be implemented in under 15 minutes and Stewart is particularly impressed with the time it now takes for server configuration.

"It's amazing," he commented. "We have flexible, stable and resilient storage and the peace of mind that an effective and efficient disaster recovery solution brings. Softcat has been first class. They obviously work very closely with their suppliers and have provided high levels of support and knowledge transfer to RASE. We trust Softcat and we trust their solution."