Datacentre

THE PERFECT PARTNER FOR FIRST DATABANK

First DataBank is the UK's leading provider of electronic medicines information, drug databases and clinical decision support. With over 30 years' experience of authoring, developing and integrating drug databases across the entire healthcare spectrum, First DataBank has unrivalled expertise and knowledge in the field of electronic medicines information.

First DataBank is part of Hearst Business Media which is owned by Hearst Corporation, one of the world's largest diversified communications companies.

Although First DataBank only has an internal IT team of three, it has successfully provided the company with a reliable and available IT infrastructure for many years. The business moved to a virtualised environment some years ago and first invested in an EqualLogic storage solution before EqualLogic was acquired by Dell.

Making the most of IT budgets

"EqualLogic storage solutions seem almost tailor-made for our requirements," explained First DataBank's IT Manager, Ian Jones. "In addition to providing the levels of performance that we require, EqualLogic gives us the capacity to grow our storage capabilities without large costs as the systems allow additional disk capacity to be added without the need to invest in additional processing power."

However, with tight IT budgets and a need to ensure a rapid return on investment, Ian Jones constantly evaluated new virtualisation technologies to ensure that his solutions remained cost-effective.

As with all organisations, business continuity and disaster recovery capabilities are of extreme importance to First DataBank, even more so given the high value placed on its drug databases. First DataBank's Multilex Drug Data File is the UK's most comprehensive and widely used drug database and is integrated into clinical systems across the whole healthcare community.

The decision was taken to enhance the existing disaster recovery capabilities by replicating data from Hearst Business Media's US site. For this, Ian Jones needed additional SAN storage capacity. The US site also used EqualLogic devices and implementing a similar solution in its UK offices would certainly have eased the data replication process but Ian wanted to ensure that any additional storage capabilities purchased by First DataBank would be best of breed and fit for purpose.

Best pricing and due diligence

"I approached Softcat for two reasons," continued Ian Jones. "Firstly I wanted to ensure that I was getting the best possible pricing if I followed the EqualLogic route. Secondly, I needed a sanity check and could rely on Softcat to quickly understand my objectives and evaluate alternative solutions, just in case there was a more cost effective system out there."

Softcat is a leading provider of software licensing, hardware, security and related IT services to corporate and public sector organisations and has particular expertise in recommending and providing virtualised storage solutions to meet the existing and future needs of its clients.

"Managing data efficiently is vital to an organisation; so much so, that Softcat's latest findings have identified that up to 65% of IT expenditure is dedicated to storage within the IT infrastructure," explained Softcat's Managing Director, Martin Hellawell. "Pressures and focus on this expenditure are heightened with the poignant issues of disaster recovery and business continuity being high on the list of priorities for most organisations. With the demands for 24x7 access, reliability and security, the need for manageable and cost effective systems is critical."

Sound economic sense

Working closely together, and drawing upon its close relationships with the world's leading virtualisation system manufacturers, Softcat and First DataBank's IT team evaluated a number of alternative solutions and concluded that EqualLogic still provided the best combinations of price, flexibility, expandability and performance. "Softcat offered great value for money and a good service," explained Ian Jones. "It just made sound economic sense to partner with them for the procurement of our new EqualLogic kit, particularly as we could not afford any problems when implementing our new disaster recovery solution."

Dell's EqualLogic storage technology virtualises the entire SAN to simplify deployment and ongoing management. Volumes are automatically provisioned as a single, scalable pool of storage that leverages all storage resources within the SAN. Even as workload demands shift or migrate between virtual machines and their physical host servers, a virtualised EqualLogic SAN automatically applies storage resources where and when they are needed without intervention or manual tuning.

"EqualLogic systems are simple to deploy, manage, and grow," explained Ian Jones. "We were already familiar with EqualLogic technologies and recognising that Softcat had the relationships with Dell to obtain competitive pricing, asked them to procure and supply our new storage systems."

A long term partnership

Since then, the partnership between First DataBank and Softcat has grown. "We needed to rationalise our Microsoft licensing and asked Softcat to undertake this for us," added Ian Jones. With over 15 years' experience of providing software licensing in the UK, and as a Microsoft Gold Partner (with competencies in Desktop and Volume Licensing, Mid Market Solutions Provision and Software Asset Management) and as a Microsoft-certified Partner and Large Account Reseller, Softcat is one of a very small number of UK LARs which has a direct trading relationship with Microsoft and access to all the licence ordering, management and provisioning systems.

Having evaluated First DataBank's Microsoft licensing policies, Softcat helped First DataBank rationalise its licensing, resulting in cost savings, simplified management and access to the very latest releases. "We were so impressed with Softcat's services in this area that we asked them to undertake a similar project on our VMware licensing and maintenance," said Ian Jones.

This long term partnership continues with future projects including the upgrade of First DataBank's VMware licensing, and the rationalisation of its maintenance and support contracts to again reduce management time and money and provide the company with a single point of contact.

"Softcat are the perfect partner for First DataBank," concluded Ian Jones. "They understand our business, understand the available technologies and work with us to ensure that we implement cost effective and efficient solutions that meet our immediate requirements but have the flexibility to expand as our needs and objectives evolve."