

## Building an accountancy practice in the Cloud

*Some businesses discover the power of cloud computing after years of conventional operation. Increasingly though, others are shaping their business around the convenient, reliable IT-as-a-Service (IaaS) model from the start – and enjoying the flexibility, economies and scalability that the Cloud allows. Acconomy Ltd, a Dorset, UK-based accountancy practice, demonstrates this perfectly – and it wouldn't have been possible without Secure Virtual Office (SVO)...*

Coming from a successful career in traditional office-based accountancy, Nigel Simmons FCCA, managing director of Acconomy Ltd, knew exactly what he *didn't* want when he launched his latest accountancy business: the constraints of conventional offices were never in the frame; nor were the long commutes and time-consuming road journeys so often associated with accountancy.

Instead, he had a clear vision of an infinitely scalable practice, with home-based staff and subcontractors – and reliable access to specialised accountancy software from anywhere with broadband internet. Because his vision included a powerful document management system (DMS), and hosting sophisticated finance systems for his clients, cloud computing offered a cost-effective option – without having to run his own servers and IT support.

### **Everything in one convenient one-stop package**

Nigel's first challenge was finding the service provider to deliver what he wanted. 'Back in 2008, when I was planning Acconomy, it was surprisingly hard to find the partner I knew I wanted.'

After prolonged web searching, Nigel found Secure Virtual Office and quickly realised they had what he needed in one convenient one-stop package.

### **Taking away IT problems**

'I didn't look elsewhere,' he explains, 'so I can't compare them with anyone else. They just seemed to have everything I wanted, put a good case for cost-effective cloud computing, and offered the peace of mind of complete IT support. I'm an accountant, not an IT expert; while I know what I want IT to do, I don't want to be involved in time-consuming tech support. I could see how SVO would take away IT problems; that was perfect.'

### **'A few teething problems – but handled well'**

'Like many new business relationships, our relationship with SVO has seen a few teething troubles. These were mainly related to deploying specialised software. However, we persevered and worked together to overcome challenges as they arose. That we're still with SVO, love what they do for us and are happy to recommend them says everything about their service. I recognise that we work in the real world where things don't always run smoothly. The important thing is how SVO responds; they've always put themselves out to get things right and build our relationship. It's a testament to the quality of the service that we take it for granted when it works – and only notice minor niggles occasionally.'

Asked to comment on how the business is different with Secure Virtual Office guiding them through the Cloud, Simmons points out that he can't compare Acconomy 'before and after'. 'All I can do is compare my current business with my experience of traditional accountancy. And it's hard, because the two are so different.'

### **Willingness to host a wide range of applications**

In particular, he highlights how staff and subcontractors work from home: 'How many traditional accountancy practices support this? Not many. With all the

documents involved, and the need for regular collaboration on files, this was once inconceivable. Now it's completely different. Along with the ability to host client finance systems, we have everything we envisaged.'

Without experience of other Cloud-based service providers, Simmons initially struggles to highlight SVO's unique differentiators. Probing deeper, it's clear that their ability to host a wide range of applications sets them apart. 'I know other providers will only host their own applications – or are biased towards QuickBooks® software. We need the flexibility to deploy applications much more eclectically – SVO gives us this capability and ensures that we always have the latest versions.'

#### **'Thumbs up' from the team**

So, teething troubles aside, and with a couple of years' experience under their belts, what does the seven-strong Acconomy team think of cloud computing?

'They love it,' confirms Simmons. 'Home working offers clear lifestyle advantages as well as travel and document-management efficiencies. Two team members who came from 'old world' accounting environments have been bowled over. What's more, because our model allows flexible home working around different domestic arrangements, we've attracted some highly-skilled accountants who wouldn't have been available to a 'bricks and mortar' business with conventional hours.'

#### **'A service that helps me expand my business'**

Along with Secure Virtual Office's willingness to host the software apps that *he* wanted, flexibility and time saving are recurring themes when Nigel Simmons discusses his SVO-backed business. And the single most memorable incident?

'Just as it's hard to quantify the benefits that we know we're enjoying, it's also hard to pin down a single episode. I suppose there's always the first time you don't have to jump in the car and drive 20 miles to

sort someone's VAT return. Come to think of it,' he continues, 'I still get a buzz whenever the Cloud saves me time or money. And when I realise that I simply couldn't offer the services that I offer to clients without Secure Virtual Office. Not only has cloud computing enabled me to run an accountancy practice, but it has enabled me to offer services such as real-time QuickBooks and other finance systems. We're already planning to develop this into a comprehensive virtual finance department service.'

#### **'I couldn't run my practice without them'**

Reliable, cost-effective cloud-based IT, helpful support when you need it, and the foundations for unrestricted business growth without the constraints of traditional IT infrastructure. What more could a business such as Acconomy need? Simmons concisely sums up what Secure Virtual Office and the Cloud mean to Acconomy

'I simply couldn't run my practice without them.'

#### **For more information:**

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