

Just Audit gets ahead in the Cloud

In 2005, Just Audit was still a dream for specialist auditor Rachel Davis FCA. Now, thanks to Secure Virtual Office (SVO), the company has embraced cloud computing, dispensed with offices and goes from strength to strength as an award-winning specialist audit business. At the heart of the company's service is the need for staff to collaborate on very large client audit files. What's more, the home-based team and its growing client base are widely dispersed. So how has cloud computing, with its reliable, flexible, always-available IT and communications, transformed how Just Audit does business in the traditionally conservative accountancy world?

Managing Director Rachel Davis launched her company in 2006, after a successful career with practices such as KPMG. Just Audit's assignments include statutory audits of limited companies, charity audits and Solicitors' Accounts Rules work. This isn't just another accountancy practice, but an *auditing specialist*, a business complementing, rather than competing with, the many accountants who aren't audit registered.

'The last thing we needed was to be tied down'

After its launch, Just Audit grew fast, with more staff joining to service an expanding client base along the London–York axis. Soon, Rachel's home office wasn't sufficient for her and her secretary, so she took the plunge and hired offices.

'Although I didn't realise it until we rented offices,' she explains, 'the last thing we wanted, or needed, was to be tied down. Whether we're firefighting or meeting tight client deadlines, our *real* needs are flexibility, responsiveness and the ability to collaborate

on client files wherever we are. From triple-monitor workstations to minimising unproductive travel time, we constantly

explored ways to increase efficiency, work smarter and service clients better – as profitably, and in as environmentally-friendly a way, as possible.

Introduced to Secure Virtual Office by the 2020 Group

Rachel first met Secure Virtual Office through the 2020 group for accountants and tax professionals. The more she discussed her needs, the more SVO's approach to cloud-based software, centralised data storage and seamlessly-converged communications resonated with her concerns about the inflexibility of being office-based.

'I should have gone straight to the Cloud'

As soon as she could, Rachel gave up her rented offices. 'With hindsight,' she admits, 'I should have gone straight to cloud computing – and Secure Virtual Office. But I didn't, because I worried what clients might think. However, since relinquishing bricks and mortar and putting our heads in the Cloud, we haven't looked back. The team loves the flexibility and clients are intrigued by our web-based, virtually paperless, business.'

She continues: 'I really respect the 2020 group, so I knew I didn't need to look elsewhere; their endorsement of Secure Virtual Office was enough. Even so, I was a bit apprehensive when we initially had to upload massive amounts of data to the Cloud. But SVO inspired confidence and we made backups. And just in case, I sent my husband to their data centre with a disc on changeover day! I needn't have worried. Everything went perfectly.'

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Easy to work with

Just Audit's positive experience continued as their relationship with SVO developed. 'From the start, they were *very* easy to work with and reassuring – in particular, their helpline team has been brilliant. We live in the real world, so, yes, there were a few teething troubles – particularly with one very specialised application. But the mark of great partners is how they deal with these hiccups and SVO have been superb: helpful; reassuring; and always easy to contact. And in the case of that one fragile application, they worked like Trojans all weekend to move it to a dedicated server to help us.'

Responsiveness

Talking with Rachel, it's clear that Just Audit is an enlightened twenty-first century organisation. Her team, all working from home, have considerable freedom to decide how and where to do their work. Cloud computing makes this possible – and helps the six-strong team collaborate more efficiently and more responsively. And although Rachel worried that clients might be put off by the absence of a conventional office, time has proved her concerns unfounded.

We know we've made savings

Asked about the savings and gains from cloud computing, Rachel says: 'It's very hard to quantify. We know we're saving money with no office and less travelling, and we know we're offering better service to clients, But quantifying the saving, be it £10k or £100k per annum is virtually impossible with actual and opportunity costs to consider. At least I know it's good for the environment when I haven't printed hard copy for a year!'

A peer lost a week when an office-based server failed

A year after embracing the Cloud, the team still marvels at how such a simple, yet fundamental, change has catapulted Just Audit into the mainstream of a technology-led, environmentally-friendly, future. Reflecting on service reliability, she struggles to recall more than a couple of hours' downtime over a year – and compares this to one industry peer's lost week's productivity from a single server problem!

Amazing from the start

'Secure Virtual Office has been amazing. Our business has been transformed, and when there have been minor hiccups, they've worked unstintingly until things were put right. What's more, their expertise has helped us solve other IT and comms issues too – including a frustratingly elusive problem with our broadband.'

So was the early apprehension about taking the leap of faith and migrating all that business data justified?

'Not at all,' explains Rachel, 'Now I laugh at my concerns every time I *don't* have to spend hours uploading and downloading

huge client audit files – or we enjoy the other conveniences and day-to-day business efficiencies that cloud computing makes possible.'

Priceless benefits

Asked to summarise her experience with the single most memorable moment in Just Audit's partnership with SVO, Rachel recalls a recent Friday afternoon when she and a colleague urgently needed to collaborate on an audit file: 'I was in the Midlands, looking forward to walking the dog with my children at the end of another busy week. My colleague was finishing an audit in a client's London offices – and looking forward to beating the Friday evening traffic. In the past, sorting this query could easily have meant several hours of file uploads and downloads – and a late finish! But with cloud computing, we got everything sorted in less than an hour: the client was delighted; my colleague left on time; and 10 minutes later, the children, Chester

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the Labrador, and I were playing Poohsticks in our local stream! That's the kind of benefit Secure Virtual Office provides and it's priceless. That's why I'd recommend Secure Virtual Office to anyone facing similar challenges. The future, I'm convinced, lies in the Cloud.'

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