

East Berkshire puts its trust in Secure Virtual Office

The power of cloud computing isn't just for small enterprises. As a third-party provider to the UK's massive NHS, the East Berkshire Primary Care Out of Hours Service employs nearly 100 people and works with numerous suppliers. From payroll to HR, accessibility, security and reliability were vital when their finance department adopted cloud-based software services. How appropriate then, that it was a Google search that led the Bracknell-based healthcare professionals to Secure Virtual Office...

With six users, nearly 100 staff and many suppliers to administer, the section's finance department relies on Sage accounts, payroll and purchase order software. Add the need for operational versatility, time saving, secure backups, and secure payslip and customer invoice distribution, and it's easy to see the challenge they faced when they decided to deploy cloud computing.

Found on the Internet

Driven by visionary CEO Patrick Rogan, the Service began looking for cloud-based IT in 2009. Starting with a Google search, the EBPCCT discovered several possible suppliers. Of these, Secure Virtual Office (SVO) impressed immediately. By August 2010, when current finance manager Gary Lunn joined the trust, system implementation was well under way.

Flexibility and value

Lunn, who worked previously for the organisation's auditors, explains why they chose SVO: 'We were impressed by the flexibility and versatility of their proposal, how their offer matched our needs perfectly, and their sensible pricing.'

As a seasoned accounting professional, Lunn was well acquainted with the differences between 'virtual office' providers: 'Having had experience with others in the past, I was used to the regular operational problems and long

waits for phone support – and pleasantly surprised to find that SVO was different.'

The initial challenge involved loading Sage software into SVO's system. This required investment of time by the organisation's in-house IT department as they worked with SVO to set everything up.'

The initial effort paid off

'Looking back on 18 months in the Cloud, that investment of time was worthwhile. Unlike other virtual office suppliers I've encountered, SVO made everything as painless as possible. They know their stuff; their systems work; and above all, dealing with them is fast and friendly. When we needed support we never had to wait in a queue; that speaks volumes about the respect with which SVO treat us and our time.'

Enjoying the benefits

Nearly two years' later, Lunn is quick to extol the benefits of SVO's cloud-based computing: 'We enjoy previously unimaginable flexibility; all we need to access our software is broadband Internet. I can work in the CEO's office or elsewhere at headquarters. And if bad weather means I can't reach the office, like last winter, or if I need to work a weekend, working from home is easy.'

'The benefits don't stop with flexibility. Because our software runs on SVO's

server, we and our auditors have the reassurance of another secure level of backup. On several occasions, pre-SVO, we came close to system failures due to IT crashes and viruses; thankfully, SVO removes that worry. It's also easier for me to review colleagues' work when they're on one secure system, rather than

different PCs. What's more, Secure Virtual Office lets us harness productivity-enhancing functionality within our software.'

The examples are numerous. 'Previously,' he says, 'it wasn't easy to do Internet banking directly from Sage with the security that the organisation demanded.'

'They know their stuff; their systems work; and above all, dealing with them is always fast and friendly.'

Because of this, online banking was relatively slow, and labour intensive. Secure Virtual Office changed that.

Pushed to quantify the savings, Lunn is reluctant to give a value. 'What I *will* say,' he adds, 'is that Secure Virtual Office saves us two to three days of high-value management time each month – mainly on payroll and sales invoicing.'

Teething issues?

The picture Lunn paints is a remarkably positive one. But surely, with the complexity of providing services to the NHS and the software involved, there must have been teething troubles? The answer will be familiar to anyone who knows Secure Virtual Office...

'There were a few things, such as the toing and froing and firewall issues while we set everything up. But we saw these more as investments into cloud computing's long-term benefits. And because the SVO team was so helpful this wasn't a problem.'

But what about the ongoing working relationship? Given Lunn's candour about experiences with other virtual offices, was his latest experience *really* so different? His response is an unequivocal yes. 'Since the system's been up and running, we've only had occasional dealings with SVO – for instance, to add a new system user. To be honest, we rarely need to speak with them; the system just works away in the background and we do business with our new-found flexibility and efficiency. And when we need help, maybe three or four times a year, their support is immediate.'

Enthusiastic ambassadors for Secure Virtual Office

Like so many SVO clients, Gary Lunn is an enthusiastic ambassador for his cloud-computing partner. 'Naturally, our six system-users enjoy the flexibility and versatility. I've already mentioned the service to several industry peers too, and I'll do so again whenever opportunities arise. Unfortunately, some of our more

technophobic peers aren't yet as comfortable with the concept as we are – a shame when the benefits are so clear.'

Asked to summarise his experience with a high spot of the relationship with Secure Virtual Office, Lunn quickly describes the challenge of emailing pay slips from within the Sage payroll software package.

'They can do anything we ask of them'

'Initially, this was impossible because our email was on a different server to Sage; this made it difficult to email payslips from within the application. Faced with time-consuming manual creation of payslips and sending payslips through the post, we challenged SVO to solve the problem. To be honest, we doubted their ability to do so. But they did, with the rapid creation of a dedicated Outlook account within SVO and some clever behind-the-scenes work in the Cloud. That was probably the most memorable "Wow!" moment in our partnership to-date. The time saving this made possible was enormous. Yes, it was the moment we realised that Secure Virtual Office really can do virtually anything we ask of them.' □

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For more information:

East Berkshire Out of Hours Service
07740 941023

Secure Virtual Office
0845 130 6063
info@SecureVirtualOffice.com
www.securevirtualoffice.com