Case study

Financial Software Limited transforms service delivery with a hosted solution from Claranet

FSL

Financial Software Limited (FSL) is a leading financial software company that has supported clients in the UK financial markets for over 16 years. FSL currently delivers its applications and services to more than 75 clients, who range from some of the UK's largest financial institutions to smaller investment management funds and banks.

The challenge

Founded as an independent software vendor (ISV), FSL has developed a range of innovative applications for investment management and taxation. Changing market trends, however, have driven an increase in the demand for more innovative service delivery models.

"What we have seen recently is that more and more companies are moving away from the traditional model of simply buying software and then installing it on their own systems," remarked Joe Hughes, Senior Technical Consultant at Financial Software Limited. "We realised that one way to help our customers maximise efficiencies was to broaden the scope of our service offerings and develop a software-as-a-service [SaaS] solution. Now, in addition to selling software, we also provide hosting services for our application portfolio."

Response to FSL's new service offerings has been impressive, and the company realised that if it was to maintain the high levels of service that customers had come to expect, it needed to improve the scalability and flexibility of its existing IT environment.

The solution

Claranet worked with FSL to design and implement a fully managed solution, running on IBM System x3550 servers with a dedicated storage area network (SAN). Claranet began by converting FSL's physical architecture to a virtual environment, using VMware vSphere.

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As the first operating system specifically designed for virtual deployments, vSphere transforms physical hardware into a shared, virtualised environment that can scale to meet dynamic workloads on demand. Using the ESXi hypervisor architecture included in VMware vSphere 5, Claranet partitioned a large number of virtual machines on six IBM System x servers.

The company also established a dual-site configuration for the environment, hosting FSL's main production systems at its primary data centre, which is located within the IBM Business Continuity and Resiliency Services facility in Chelmsford, Essex. A second virtual platform was built at another Claranet data centre in Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire, and will provide disaster recovery capabilities in the event of system downtime.

IBM System x3550 servers deliver high availability and scalability, providing an efficient, secure base for FSL's private environment. Multiple System x3550 servers are used to run the company's production systems, with an equivalent number of servers being housed in Claranet's second data centre and used for disaster recovery.

To provide failover capabilities between the two hosting sites, Claranet is using VMware Site Recovery Manager. This disaster recovery solution leverages vSphere Replication to deliver simple and powerful replication of applications to Claranet's secondary data centre, along with fully automated site recovery and migration.

"The new environment has massively reduced risk for us as a company," noted Hughes. "As our applications on the virtual machines can be automatically moved from one ESXi host to another, it doesn't matter if a physical server fails. In the highly unlikely event that the main data centre goes down entirely, VMware Site Recovery Manager will provide automatic failover to a second data centre. This will allow us to get our systems back up and running in just minutes, compared to the days it would have taken to recover our data from tape storage in the past. In this way, we can almost completely eliminate downtime for our clients."

The result

With its new platform, FSL has gained the flexibility it needs to meet the changing demands of a growing client base and to guarantee high levels of customer service. IBM System x3550 servers provide high levels of scalability, making them ideal for consolidating large numbers of virtual machines onto a single server, and for virtualising the large databases and mission-critical workloads that FSL hosts for its customers.

"It is much quicker and easier for us to add more resources as we need them, which is critical to us as we continue to grow and provide hosted application services for more clients," Hughes continued. "Our applications are highly customised, which means that every time we develop a new version of a particular application, we have to provision a new server for testing and development, as well as a standalone production environment. In the past, it would take us up to three weeks to provision new hosted application environments on our physical servers. Now, we can get an application up and running in under two hours."

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> **Imran Khan**
> **Managing Director at FSL**

Imran Khan, Managing Director of Financial Software Limited, concluded: "When we started this project, we had two main requirements: we were looking for a solution that would enable us to rapidly scale production to meet changing demand and that would guarantee near-constant uptime for our operations. The solution that Claranet has developed for us has absolutely delivered on these requirements, and allows us to provide better service to our clients at a lower cost, helping to boost our competitive edge."

Key services:
- Hosted Voice
- Managed Networks and MPLS

For more information about Claranet's services, and the benefits these deliver, go to: www.claranet.co.uk

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