BCA

Virtual desktop **infrastructure** improves the **learner experience**

Located on a 400-acre estate and describing itself as "the pre-eminent provider of further education and professional training in Maidenhead and the surrounding area", Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA) is a high-performing college with success rates significantly above the national benchmark. The College offers full-time, part-time and higher education studies, as well as apprenticeships, with courses including Animal Management, Equestrian, Business & Enterprise, Science, Art & Design, Outdoor Education and Sport.

When BCA recognised the need to overhaul its IT infrastructure, incorporating networks, servers and desktop, it turned to Daisy. With ageing and inefficient physical servers replaced by a virtualised HP-based infrastructure, Daisy also implemented a virtual desktop infrastructure to deliver new and enhanced services to users, reducing the need for central provisioning through a smarter and more cost-effective approach to delivering and maintaining a powerful desktop environment.

Challenge

The education sector is increasingly competitive, with the facilities and services provided to staff and students playing an important role in attracting students and driving excellence in results. Indeed, with colleges under pressure to deliver, those unable to compete effectively and attract sufficient numbers of students may be forced to merge with other institutions in order to survive. Strong IT provision that is planned, implemented and managed in the most efficient and value-for-money way, can prove critical.

At BCA, however, restricted budgets and limited personnel meant the IT infrastructure had suffered from lack of focus and investment for a number of years. Despite a "standard" environment, including SQL database, Microsoft Exchange and staff email, performance and availability were poor, with service level agreements (SLAs) difficult, if not impossible, to meet.

How We Help

Client
With 2,000 learners, BCA provides a wide range of vocational, academic and occupational courses to 16–19 year old students and adult learners, plus an "outstanding" schools programme for 14-16 year olds.

Challenge
Update and refresh an ageing IT infrastructure to deliver higher performance and improved services for users; provide new facilities, ease management overheads and reduce costs.

Solution
Virtual Desktop infrastructure (VDI) from Daisy

Benefits
User applications and profiles for the 500-strong desktop community are managed centrally as part of the new high availability virtualised infrastructure, fully scalable to support future growth in user numbers and changing business requirements.

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Responding to these issues, BCA approved a wide-ranging renewal programme, including the desktop. The opportunity identified by Dean Palmer, BCA's Director of IT, was to design and implement a fit-for-purpose high performance, high availability and fully scalable IT infrastructure able to support College administration, staff and students for at least the next five years.

Solution

BCA chose Daisy as its preferred supplier for a new virtualised desktop infrastructure (VDI), together with a server virtualisation solution, new data storage and backup capabilities, and updated network. This decision was, in part, based on Daisy's status as an HP Education Partner along with its track record of delivering for other educational establishments with similar requirements to those of BCA. The College also recognised Daisy's abilities to meet strict deadlines, providing solutions on time and within budget. With the VDI solution sized and desktops built for 500 users, user profiles and applications are hosted in a datacentre onsite, with activities such as rollout, administering patches, updates and upgrades handled centrally. The College has the flexibility to add, delete or change profiles as required, while options are also available for users to log into their profile from other approved locations, using agreed devices. The VDI project, completed by Daisy at the start of 2014, was gradually rolled out to users in a series of incremental steps.

"We have worked with Daisy for many years and always found them very impressive. Daisy had also delivered similar projects to other education organisations so I knew we were in safe hands."

Dean Palmer – Director of IT, Berkshire College of Agriculture

Improving the user experience

Feedback has been extremely positive. Previously, users were reliant on ageing file servers, which meant that even opening a simple Word document could take a significant amount of time. By contrast, users now have fast and easy access to all key applications and data they need. Even though the virtualised environment is sized for 500 desktops, more than enough for current requirements, additional memory could support higher numbers of users. The VDI approach also provides the College with enhanced business continuity and resilience capabilities in the event of a disaster or serious data loss. The new server virtualisation solution and data storage capabilities, also implemented by Daisy, enable advanced data backup, replication and recovery; BCA is currently storing almost seven terabytes of backup data, with disk-based backups retained for 90 days and backups to tape kept offsite for three months. The VDI solution, meanwhile, provides further disaster recovery capabilities at no additional cost: if an incident occurs, the VDI can be instantly replicated and rolled-out, with all data required.

About Daisy

We are UK leaders in providing Communications and IT infrastructure managed services to help businesses innovate and grow while cutting costs and risk. We can host your services in the cloud or in the data centre, simplify desktop management, and build secure, reliable networks. Our business availability services can keep you working at all times. Whatever your needs, our professional experts can advise, plan and deploy, while our nationwide network of engineers are easily available for your support.

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