

CB Richard Ellis

Kelway implements an efficient, modern and standardised personal computing environment for CB Richard Ellis

CB Richard Ellis

CB Richard Ellis is the world's leading commercial real estate advisor. With over 29,000 employees in more than 50 countries, this respected international enterprise has more consultants advising more customers than any other property firm. Its European, Middle East and African (EMEA) operations alone have more than €10.6 billion of property investment assets under management.

The real estate experts at CB Richard Ellis pride themselves on having an intimate knowledge of all classes of real estate in all major markets worldwide and believe in providing a personal service, utilising local resource from each location where they operate. In the information intensive world of real estate, these experts rely heavily on a wide range of applications and utilities to deliver their services. Consequently, the computers they use have to perform to a high standard and must, therefore, be kept up-to-date.

The Challenge

CB Richard Ellis employs more than 1,100 real estate professionals at its London offices who make extensive use of personal computing. In addition to standard office automation facilities, they need access to over 50 different software packages; many of them bespoke applications, in the course of their work.

A large number of variant versions of applications made communication between staff difficult. This had a direct impact on the productivity of the business leading to frustrations and reduced confidence in the business' ability to deliver requirements.

Over time, the population of desktop and laptop computers in the company's London user community had become less consistent. The number of different system images deployed had increased and old operating systems were still widely used. In addition, a significant proportion of the hardware in use was now past its prime and needed to be replaced. The hardware estate was becoming aged and, as a consequence, becoming less reliable. This gradually led to a reduction of availability of critical applications to the users with the knock on effect of reduced productivity and increased pressure of hitting business deadlines.

Heavy system management had a direct effect on the efficiency of the business as high level members of the technical department would spend time fire-fighting rather than implementing business improvement projects. The consequence of that was on staff morale as well as causing delays to the business improvement projects designed to increase productivity.

The growing variety of systems in operation was resulting in an increased support and maintenance workload and productivity would clearly benefit from upgrading out-of-date hardware and system software. Mansoor Rahaman, CTO for EMEA at CB Richard Ellis, decided that the time for a major refresh of the personal computing environment was due.

"The challenge we faced was to implement a consistent environment across all our personal computers while making sure that the variety of specialised applications in use continued to function correctly," explains Mansoor. "This had to be accomplished in a timely manner and without impacting business operations."

Kelway had a long and successful history supplying IT products and services to CB Richard Ellis and Mansoor had confidence in the technical expertise and dependability of its consultants, consequently he asked Kelway to co-ordinate and resource the upgrading of all the user systems for the London office. HP personal computers were chosen for the upgrade as they had become the standard in the environment due to their performance and reliability.

"The quality of Kelway's project management and technical skills ensured that the project was completed on time and without disruption to the business."

Mansoor Rahaman - CB Richard Ellis

The Solution

Rebuilding the computing environment for more than a thousand people, including providing new computers for about 400 of them, without impacting on their work, requires careful planning and preparation. Kelway appointed an experienced project manager to lead the activity and resources were assigned from both Kelway and CB Richard Ellis to form a joint implementation team.

With the project schedule and the specification of the new computing environment agreed, Kelway's project manager produced a comprehensive and detailed plan, breaking the exercise down into a series of logical steps designed to minimise risk to the business.

As in all complex projects, the preparation phase is especially critical. Kelway began by carrying out an audit of the existing systems to identify all the applications in use, with any non standard applications being referred to the IT department. All the required applications were then tested with the new system configuration to make sure they worked correctly. In addition, a pilot of the upgrade was executed within the IT department to ensure the process worked smoothly.

Before proceeding with the upgrade across the company, selected representatives from each operational department went through the process first; these test subjects were carefully monitored and any issues recorded. This included signing off the upgrade as a working solution before any new software was rolled out to their department.

With the preparation phase successfully completed, the upgrade process was then carried out across the targeted user community. To reduce the impact on staff, all the work was

scheduled out of normal office hours with as many as 100 users being upgraded each weekend.

Before being upgraded, every individual was visited to make sure all their personal files were backed up and any special application needs were identified before their systems were replaced. To ensure no data was accidentally lost, old systems were left untouched for several days and made available in the event of missing data.

The upgrade process for each user was then carried out. This consisted of installing their new hardware, recording its details for the asset register, adding the necessary applications and reloading all personal files from the earlier backup. The new systems were then thoroughly tested.

"We appreciated the fact that user satisfaction was a top priority for Kelway. After each department was upgraded, an engineer was nominated as a floorwalker, visiting each user to resolve any resulting issues or questions," says Mansoor. "The task was not considered complete until every user was happy and had signed off on their new system."

A key objective of the project was the creation of an up-to-date and comprehensive asset register, with all computers asset tagged and their details recorded in a central spreadsheet. The final stage of the project consisted of an audit of all systems to ensure the accuracy of the register.

"Kelway's planning and execution was meticulous, resulting in a smooth and timely upgrade project," says Mansoor. "We were kept fully informed on the status of the upgrade at all times, which was reassuring."

The Results

The real estate professionals at CB Richard Ellis' London offices now have up-to-date, consistent computer systems at their disposal and productivity is no longer at risk from ageing, unreliable hardware or software. The new HP desktop and laptop computers have proven to be highly reliable and all equipment has been recorded in an accurate asset register.

Up-to-date configurations have resulted in the reduction of system management workload, therefore giving the business the direct benefit of the availability of technical staff to implement business improvement projects in a more timely manner.

The perception of the technical department has vastly improved throughout the business allowing a greatly enhanced working

relationship with the knock on effect of all of the benefits to the business of a team environment.

Furthermore, the improvement of the technical team morale has increased staff retention bringing with it all of the financial and productivity benefits.

"In addition to improving the user experience, the new infrastructure has delivered many benefits to the IT department," reports Mansoor. "The reduced number of software configuration variants has made system administration easier as the support workload has been significantly reduced, therefore reducing management costs and allowing valuable resource to focus on other key areas of the business."

Key benefits

Through professional project management and rigorous attention to detail, Kelway succeeded in executing a large-scale upgrade of CB Richard Ellis' end user computing infrastructure on schedule and with minimal impact on business operations. The new computing environment, featuring new HP hardware and using a reduced number of tested software configurations, has considerably reduced management and support overheads. The investment is expected to increase end user productivity by 10% and provide an ROI in excess of 25% over eighteen months.

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