

London Borough of Brent Council

Virtual solutions offer real cost savings

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The London Borough of Brent is located in North West London between the boroughs of Harrow, Camden, Ealing and Barnet. Looking after a population of 271,000, the council has an annual budget requirement of £244 million. There are 3,500 office-based employees.

The Challenge

According to Prod Sarigianis, Business Support Manager Information Technology Unit, Brent has more than 200 servers in 60 locations - there are 100 servers in one building. Departmental-based computing had grown at the expense of central control, leading to significant utilisation mismatches. As a result, IT spending was running at more than twice as high as needed.

Another major worry was resilience. Despite having good backups, any server problems always forced users to wait for repair or replacement. Grossly under-used systems in one part of the borough could not be switched over to cover any downtime elsewhere - the result of historically high network communications costs between buildings. However, cheaper wide area links and the emergence of virtualisation technology offered the opportunity to improve the infrastructure and cut costs.

The challenge was to reduce operating costs, provide a highly-available resilient service to users and include an easy-to-invoke disaster recovery solution.

"The key thing for us was Kelway's ability to undertake enterprise solution and disaster recovery design using the latest VMware virtualisation technology. They not only gave us a server consolidation report but were able to turn those results into a robust yet practical design with a detailed hardware specification. Thanks to Kelway, we will be implementing our new infrastructure during Spring 2008 and substantially reducing our hardware costs by £400,000 over the next five years".

Prod Sarigianis, Business Support Manager, London Borough of Brent Council

The Solution

Following a VMware virtualisation seminar held by Kelway during summer 2007, Brent took up an offer of a detailed server consolidation report. Kelway installed data collector software at Brent to gather server inventory and performance data to identify potential candidates for virtualisation and find possible financial savings.

"Kelway's report was good and we were pleased with what we saw. We then decided that we needed more external help as we had no experience of virtualisation," said Sarigianis. The report clearly showed how Brent's IT resources could be optimised while enhancing the availability of 30 key business applications, improving IT resource management, and reducing power/cooling

requirements. It gave detailed server consolidation cost-savings and, thanks to years of VMware best practice, Kelway successfully convinced Brent that the number of servers could be drastically yet safely reduced.

Kelway then developed a virtualisation and an active/active (mirrored) resilient design with an accompanying hardware specification. Detailed requirements for server blades, storage and backup were defined together with explanatory information to help Brent interpret supplier responses. Kelway also gave an overview of how each component fitted into the solution, the advantages and disadvantages of different design options and criteria for vendor selection as well as covering VMware licensing, energy costs, and future disposal issues.

The Results

The objectives were to reduce operating costs, provide a highly-available resilient service to users and include an easy-to-invoke disaster recovery solution. The plan to ensure business continuity was to have two separate data centres - one for resilience and disaster recovery - with perhaps around 40 blade servers in total. Two centres also offered the opportunity to satisfy Brent's green agenda by minimising power and cooling requirements.

In using Kelway for this important work, Sarigianis acknowledges the supplier's years of experience in implementing virtualisation on different platforms across many business sectors. Kelway also offers a well-proven methodology for

deployment, covering everything from planning to management.

Brent now has a resilient, highly-available solution that's easier to manage, more flexible and more scalable than ever before. Business continuity is fully supported, enabling users to avoid disruptive downtime while providing the added reassurance of disaster recovery. The server consolidation project will save £400,000 over five years in hardware costs alone as well as needing fewer server rooms. By deploying virtualisation technology, the London Borough of Brent has created an enterprise-class infrastructure that's second to none.

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