



Crest Nicholson safeguards staff productivity with new IT infrastructure and managed service



Customer agenda

- Cost Reduction
- Continuous Improvement/Innovation
- Environmentally Concious

Services

- Workplace Strategy
- Product Fulfilment Service
- Desktop Migration
- Infrastructure Virtualisation
- Replication
- Recovery, Disposal & Recycling
- Dedicated Service Desk
- User Collaboration

Technology

Software: Microsoft Vista, Microsoft Server 2003, Microsoft Office 2007, Microsoft SQL, Microsoft Active Directory, Microsoft SharePoint, VMware, Citrix Access Gateway and Quest email archiving

Hardware: HP desktops and laptops, HP blade servers, NetApp Storage Area Network (SAN) and Cisco

Customer challenge

With the efficient processing of new house sales dependent on IT, Crest Nicholson needs a reliable and flexible infrastructure – especially in today's challenging housing market. Crest Nicholson's IT environment had built up over a number of years by adding infrastructure as required. This meant that it lacked standardisation and resilience and was time-consuming to support. To address this, Crest Nicholson embarked on an IT transformation programme.

Computacenter solution

Computacenter is helping to design, procure, configure and install a new IT environment for Crest Nicholson, which the company will then manage as part of a five-year contract. The infrastructure refresh programme includes new desktops and laptops, virtualised servers and a centralised Storage Area Network (SAN) to protect business critical data and emails. By introducing new technologies such as Microsoft SharePoint, Crest Nicholson intends to increase collaboration and enhance its document management capabilities.

Results

The partnership with Computacenter has helped Crest Nicholson simplify IT management and will free up staff for strategic enablement. The new IT infrastructure will reduce business risk, increase productivity and speed up the provisioning of IT at new housing development sites.

Customer profile

Developing sustainable housing

Crest Nicholson is one of the largest homebuilders and developers in the UK. The company is headquartered in Chertsey, Surrey and has six regional business units and a central regeneration business unit.

Founded in 1963, Crest Nicholson became a private company in May 2007, when it was purchased by Castle Bidco – a joint venture between HBOS and West Coast Capital.

The company is increasingly focused on sustainable development, and is investing in improving its expertise in this area to meet the government target of zero carbon housing by 2016. As a result of this investment, Crest Nicholson won the Queen's Award for Enterprise in Sustainable Development in 2007.

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Myles Gibbins
Group IT Director
Crest Nicholson

Business challenge

Coping with market fluctuations and legacy IT

The housing industry has been hit hard by the current economic climate. At the same time as increasing efficiency to reduce costs, Crest Nicholson needs to be prepared for when the housing market picks up again.

Myles Gibbins, Group IT Director at Crest Nicholson, comments: “All new house purchases are processed onsite, so IT downtime at any of our developments can significantly hamper our ability to process sales in an efficient and timely manner.”

Crest Nicholson therefore needs to provide staff with reliable access to its IT systems at each of its seven offices plus around 100 development sites. Provisioning IT quickly at these sites can be particularly challenging for the company. Building sites, by their nature, often lack basic utilities such as telecommunications lines.

Although availability was a key consideration, the main IT challenges for Crest Nicholson related to the manner in which its infrastructure had grown. As Myles explains: “Our IT infrastructure lacked a formal architecture. Investment had been on a tactical basis to support new systems, but was not strategically aligned with the business objectives.”

This had led to an aging and non-standardised IT infrastructure that lacked resilience and was expensive to support. Crest Nicholson recognised that rather than upgrade individual elements, it would be more efficient and practical to embark on an infrastructure refresh programme that encompassed its entire IT estate – from client devices and the network to storage and backup facilities.

To help improve IT service delivery and enable the adoption of a more mature support model, including best practice methodologies, the company also decided to transfer the responsibility for day-to-day IT operations to an external service provider.

IT solution

Transforming IT to improve business continuity

Computacenter has been responsible for hosting Crest Nicholson's datacenter since 2006. Due to the strength of this existing relationship and the cultural fit between the two organisations, Crest Nicholson turned to Computacenter to help with the transformation and ongoing IT management.

To maximise the investment in the new environment and service delivery model, the companies carried out a series of workshops to define Crest Nicholson's business needs and the appropriate IT solutions. This includes replacing the company's 600-strong desktop and laptop estate with brand new HP devices, which will be installed with Microsoft Vista and Microsoft Office 2007.

To improve staff communications, the programme also entails an email upgrade and the introduction of a new archiving solution. Microsoft Outlook Web Access provides staff with remote access to email and the introduction of a Citrix Access Gateway will allow the company broader access to its systems.

As well as enhancing its client estate, Crest Nicholson will also upgrade its servers to Microsoft Server 2003, some of which will be virtualised using VMware, deploy Microsoft Active Directory to enable centralised management of its IT estate and implement Microsoft SharePoint for collaborative working and document management.

To safeguard Crest Nicholson's corporate data, Computacenter is helping to implement two SANs linked to Crest Nicholson's regional servers, which will offer greater capacity and flexibility than the current distributed storage system.

Data housed on the SAN will be replicated to a mirrored environment at a separate site via a Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) link. "Our previous backup solution was based on tape, which meant that in the event of an incident we had to retrieve tapes from off-site storage, provision and build new servers and then recover the data. This process could have taken days," comments Myles. "Once the new disaster recovery solution is complete we will be able to recover from an incident in minutes."

Computacenter's specialist IT asset disposal subsidiary RDC is responsible for remarketing and recycling the legacy servers and client devices in line with Crest Nicholson's environmental policies.

End-to-end IT management

As well as helping to design and implement Crest Nicholson's new IT infrastructure, Computacenter is also responsible for managing both legacy and new technologies.

Under a five-year managed services deal, Computacenter will provide support to the company's users from its central helpdesk facility in Cape Town, South Africa. Computacenter will also be responsible for provisioning IT for Crest Nicholson's new development sites.

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The end-to-end managed services contract even extends to Crest Nicholson's telecommunications provision, with Computacenter managing a third party telecoms company. The three organisations are currently working together to design and deploy a wireless solution to multiple sites.

As part of the contract, 10 Crest Nicholson employees have been transferred to Computacenter via Transfer of Undertakings, Protection of Employment (TUPE) regulations. "Computacenter's mytransfer methodology ensured that we maintained a good level of communication with the affected staff throughout the process, resulting in a smooth transition for all those involved," comments Myles.

“Computacenter provides us with access to specific skills and resources as and when we need them.”

Myles Gibbins
Group IT Director
Crest Nicholson

Results

Improved business agility and productivity

Although the infrastructure refresh programme is still ongoing, Crest Nicholson is already starting to see the benefits of the partnership with Computacenter.

"By selecting a single company for the refresh programme and ongoing service provision, we have been able to simplify IT management," comments Myles. "Computacenter provides us with access to specific skills and resources as and when we need them."

Crest Nicholson's new IT infrastructure and service delivery model will enable it to:

Improve staff productivity and satisfaction: Better quality IT services and improved IT availability will lead to happier, more productive staff. The greater functionality offered by the new technologies, such as remote email access, will also help employees to carry out daily tasks more efficiently.

Reduce risk: Crest Nicholson is able to minimise the risk of IT downtime and recover from incidents, such as server outages, much faster thanks to its enhanced disaster recovery capabilities.

Increase business agility: Provisioning Crest Nicholson's development sites with IT will be much faster, enabling the company to improve the efficiency of its sales operations. The service is also easily scalable to meet changes in Crest Nicholson's business requirements.

Once the refresh programme is complete, Crest Nicholson will have a robust yet sophisticated IT environment from which to meet both current and future business needs.

"By outsourcing day-to-day IT services to an external provider, we can free up the internal team to focus on business intelligence and analysis that will enhance competitive advantage. This will put us in a stronger position to cope with changes in the housing market," comments Myles.

More resources

To find out more about our infrastructure and managed services, visit:

www.computacenter.com/services

Read more customer case studies at:

www.computacenter.com/case-study