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Tribe
Customer
Journey



Redpaths accelerates transformation journey with Microsoft 365 and Azure

Having initiated a move to the cloud nearly a decade ago, leading South Island electrical wholesaler Redpaths has accelerated its capabilities by taking advantage of new developments in the Microsoft Azure ecosystem. As a result of a now-complete shift to the cloud, Redpaths today enjoys greater flexibility and performance, with reduced costs, thanks to the combination of Office 365, Dynamics and multiple Azure services.

Established in Christchurch in 1945 as an electrical wholesaler, Redpaths has grown and developed into a leading supplier of electrical products across the South Island. The company prides itself on providing exceptional customer service, a complete range of readily accessible stock and a forward thinking, customer-centred business approach. All of these goals are closely linked to a high-performance technology stack which enables the company's electricians, technicians and specialists, 112 of them in 15 branches across the South Island, to consistently meet customer expectations.

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Situation

As a business which has enjoyed a long successful history, it is inevitable that what was once fit for purpose has become obsolete and a barrier to optimal operational performance.

Owner-CEO Tony Saunders says it this was becoming apparent the business was in danger of not being able to operate effectively, and so sharpened its focus on the capability of quality IT systems to accelerate business performance. “We’re electrical wholesalers, not IT people – but at the same time, being as effective as possible in your work does depend on having the best available tools.”

That’s why, adds Tony, the company relies on its technology partner Tribe to provide insight, guidance and ultimately, fit-for-purpose technology solutions which accelerate staff productivity and user convenience.

Opportunity for progress was available by automating and digitising everyday office processes, developing a true CRM solution and moving to a more collaborative technology model integrating various modern and legacy software solutions.

Solution

As the saying goes, it’s difficult to boil the ocean, so Redpaths took a considered approach to its transformation journey. Initial steps saw servers consolidated and hosted in the cloud, reducing their number to a third. Desktop systems were standardised and replaced and a Microsoft Services Provider License Agreement (SPLA) made available all Microsoft apps for a single fee.

In due course and with 15 branches across the South Island, an improvement in true communication was needed, and a way to bring the teams together more effectively. Getting started involved introducing the latest Microsoft Surface Pro devices for all sales staff and managers, with the power of Windows 10 and ultra-portability setting the scene for additional services to enable true ‘work anywhere’ capability.



The introduction of Microsoft 365 delivered a combination of the familiar applications in Office 365, the perfect complement to Windows 10, and Microsoft Security. This means security is both improved and – in a move that every user appreciates – greatly simplified, with Windows Hello’s facial recognition making ‘being secure’ easy. This is complemented with Azure Multi Factor Authentication for access to applications outside of the main branches.

Owner-director Gayle Saunders says the upgrades to Microsoft cloud technologies has ‘turned us all on our heads’. “It was frightening at first purely because there is so much change involved – but once you get to grips with it, it’s amazing what you can do,” she notes.

Standard applications rolled out at Redpaths include SharePoint for storage and collaboration, PowerApps and Flow for automation; this third party application BambooHR is integrated for handling personnel requirements and compliance.

At the same time, Redpaths has opted for Dynamics CRM 365 to support improved customer interactions and has deployed multiple Azure services in support of its infrastructure.

Redpaths is also in the process of upgrading its Skype for Business to Microsoft Teams, and increasingly putting the functionality of Power BI to work for new business insights.

These steps dramatically improved resilience and performance, particularly when combined with a fibre WAN upgrade for improved connectivity.

Results

Thanks to the most recent updates to its now-thoroughly modern and flexible IT infrastructure, Redpaths enjoys state of the art communication and collaboration with Teams and Skype For Business working hand in glove with SharePoint and OneDrive. There are no longer any on-premise servers, with legacy infrastructure now in the Azure cloud and including Exchange 365, all Microsoft 365 Applications, SharePoint for Files and Folders and MFA for all users.

Gayle says that in short, Microsoft Office and the supporting Azure services just make working so much easier. “We used to get fouled up with files in multiple areas being worked on by multiple people, making simple tasks confusing and frustrating.”

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The Dynamics 365 CRM Solution, which was implemented with the assistance of third-party specialist Fusion 5, has delivered new insights into the Redpaths customer base, equipping the sales team to better serve their clients.

The benefit which most readily comes to mind for Tony is the obvious improvement in resilience Redpaths enjoys over on-premise systems. "Before, the incumbent system was probably down two or three times a week and always at the wrong time," he says. "Since we've gone through this exercise, I don't think we've had any service interruption - period."

This advantage is wrapped in the key benefits offered by the combination of Azure and Microsoft 365 of enhanced security, mobility and accessibility. Protected with multifactor authentication and backed up multiple times in the Azure cloud (on OneDrive and SharePoint), Redpaths no longer has any concerns about data persistence and security. Those who need to access information or services to get their jobs done are able to do so from anywhere, so long as they have an internet connection.

It's even had an effect on how Redpaths' offices are structured. Hot desks are set up with multiple monitors, so field workers can arrive at any office, plug in and get to work with no need to dial into servers. Even a legacy ERP system has been 'wrapped' with Microsoft Remote App to perform as if it too were in the cloud.

Gayle credits Tribe's approach and process with the resultant value. "The training provided was really, really good. It made the technology accessible and understandable. Now, all our stuff is real time, completely secure and we have peace of mind that everything going to our people is correct and the same version. That makes a huge difference in accelerating collaboration."

Visibility, too, is greatly improved and for a rapidly growing company, Gayle says this value cannot be overestimated. "Our expansion is mind boggling. It just wouldn't be possible without a good technology setup, which has included Tribe looking closely at our processes so we can work smarter and in a more co-ordinated fashion."

Tony has praise for the usability and accessibility of Microsoft's cloud solutions, which has eased user acceptance. "We've been able to change the way we do business while bringing our people along – especially the younger generations who enjoy working online."

For any company considering upgrading ageing infrastructure, Tony offers succinct advice. "If you think you can stay operating Windows 7 and using on premise servers, you're dreaming. You don't want to find out how you're going to work if you can't get your data. You have to give this priority. You'd be foolish if you didn't look seriously at the Microsoft cloud."



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