

# ESPC builds firm foundations for its vital Internet presence with IBM and Castle Computer Services

## Overview

### Customer challenge

ESPC's website is the cornerstone of its business. However, demand for new applications and increasing web traffic led to the continual deployment of new servers. The data centre was running out of space and consuming large amounts of energy at increasing financial and environmental cost.

### Solution

IBM Business Partner Castle Computer Services helped ESPC build a flexible, scalable, virtualised IBM infrastructure which is already demonstrating impressive energy savings. ESPC expects to pay back its investment in around 18 months.

### Customer benefits

- Projected annual power savings of £35,000
- Projected annual carbon savings equivalent to taking 35 cars off the road each year
- Physical Servers reduced from 49 to 14 freeing valuable office space
- Integrated data management from one central location
- High system availability
- Improved business continuity
- Scalable, flexible solution.



Edinburgh Solicitors Property Centre (ESPC) opened in 1971, offering people in east central Scotland a cost-effective and hassle-free way to buy and sell homes. Now a familiar brand in the region, this mid-sized company's website is the heart and soul of the business, handling over 265,000 unique visitors, more than 12.6 million page views and 1.2 million property information downloads a month. ESPC's reputation depends on systems that deliver fault-free website availability around the clock.

"Technology is vital to this business," explains Mike Ryan, IT Manager at ESPC. "More than anything else, we're a data handling company these days. This means that here in the IT department we need to be highly adaptable so that we can help the business move in whatever direction the board decides on." The stream of new applications and the

growth in web traffic meant that the IT department was continually deploying new servers, which in most cases utilised a tiny fraction of their potential capacity.

*"This is by no means the sort of technology that's only for larger businesses. It's worked very well for us – perhaps even better than it might do for a large corporation."*

– Mike Ryan, IT Manager at ESPC

Built on



offerings



### **Hardware past its prime**

“Our requirement for more and more servers was turning into a management nightmare,” recalls Ryan. “There was no more space in the data centre. And when it came to software upgrades, can you imagine patching 49 servers, or managing the back-up process? We could easily have employed one person doing nothing else.” The age of some of the hardware was an issue as much of it was past its prime and, added to this, running so many servers meant an energy overhead that came at vast cost – both financial and environmental.

For these reasons and for the sake of ensuring better business continuity in the event of a disaster, Ryan asked IBM Business Partner Castle Computer Services to help him take a fresh look. The result was an entirely new IBM Express Advantage solution based around IBM BladeCenter® HS21 dual processor servers, an IBM System Storage™ DS4700 Express storage area network (SAN) and VMware virtualisation software.

“When we checked the utilisation of servers pre-virtualisation, it was peaking at 7.79%,” says Andrew Cruickshank, Technical Manager at Castle Computer Services. “With the costs involved in buying and running 49 different servers, this was neither a worthwhile investment, nor a green one. ESPC needed fewer servers, greater manageability, more space and improved agility to help them meet long-term goals.”

Castle’s virtualisation expertise has enabled ESPC to reduce to just 14 servers. The company is looking forward to power savings worth around £35,000 and a carbon emission reduction equivalent to taking 35 cars off the road annually.

### **Many happy returns**

ESPC’s robust new solution is extremely cost effective and the company will have paid back its investment within 18 months. In addition to the power savings achieved, the IBM BladeCenter integrates servers, storage and networking with powerful system management tools to simplify and reduce the cost of IT management.

ESPC also now has the ability to recover quickly in the event of a disaster and, with its scalable IBM SAN capability, the company can protect and manage its growing amounts of data from one central location, avoiding the problem of silos of information dotted around the business.

It took only two days to bring all the new blade servers online. “That was with one Castle employee and three of us,” recalls Ryan. “Plus it was managed with zero downtime for the business.”

It’s now easy for ESPC to increase server capacity without having to buy a whole new server. “When you think of the money we’re saving on power, that’s also a lot of energy we’re not wasting,” says Ryan. “The environment is a key consideration for us.

There are many government regulations on the way, and it's good to be ahead of the curve. There are also likely to be more grants for businesses with green credentials, which is something I will keep an eye open for."

### **Partnership with tangible benefits**

On working with Castle on the deployment, Ryan explains: "We had an existing relationship with Castle. It's provided support services to us for a long time. We knew it dealt with IBM and VMware, so we did a small deployment and saw what was possible. At one of our meetings Andrew floated the idea of rolling out virtualisation across all servers and the seed was sown."

Starting with a small virtualisation pilot project enabled ESPC to see what the benefits would be and to benchmark the whole process. Castle consulted with the company on achieving the right end result and getting tangible benefits for the business.

Ryan views Castle as a long-term partner. He says: "Our contacts at Castle are very communicative, and quick to get back to us when we've needed support – which I have to say has not been very often."

It's already clear that promised returns on investment are being realised. "If you spend £10,000 on a server and you only use 10% of its capacity, then you've wasted £9,000," explains Ryan. "The best way of saving this sort of waste was to move to blade servers and virtualisation."

### **A growing asset**

ESPC now has a dynamic solution based on IBM Express Advantage offerings that are scalable enough to grow with its business. Ryan summarises the key benefits to date as a smaller carbon footprint and cost reductions on power spend. "With energy costs going up, I'm expecting to see this increase proportionately," he says. "Also space saved is a key benefit. We're in a prime Edinburgh location so space is not cheap. We're managing fewer suppliers too and have a single point of contact for the whole solution. We're future proofed for, I'd say, at least three years – probably longer. In future, as requirements change, I can make the changes I need."

Ryan continues: "I tell everyone that it wasn't a hard move to make. This is by no means the sort of technology that's only for larger businesses. It's worked very well for us – perhaps even better than it might do for a large corporation."

With ESPC moving into new market areas, such as providing home information packs, the new IBM platform is proving flexible enough to support changing needs. "We wanted a system that offered high availability and which can scale, and I am happy to say that we have achieved that," Ryan concludes.

### **For more information**

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