



Overview

Customer challenge

Eaga's business had doubled in size within three years, generating performance, storage and operational demands which the company's ageing IT infrastructure could not meet. The small internal IT team needed help to update its systems and implement a solid, resilient and scalable platform to improve performance, safeguard data and support continued business expansion.

Solution

Eaga worked with IBM Business Partner ITPS to review existing systems and implement a company-wide solution that included energy-efficient IBM BladeCenters®, a high-performance storage area network, enterprise backup and dynamic failover. ITPS also reinforced the entire cabling and physical environment.

Eaga Group

Boosts performance and supports future growth with IBM and ITPS

Eaga (Energy Action Grant Agency) Group PLC was established in 1990 to lead government-funded efforts to improve the living conditions of vulnerable people living in energy-inefficient homes across England. It is now the UK's leading provider of services, products and solutions that address the social, environmental and energy-efficiency objectives of government and the private sector throughout the UK, as well as in Canada, India and the Republic of Ireland. Across the UK alone, the company makes energy-efficiency improvements to over 1,000 homes every day, and has completed a total of some 5 million projects since it began operations.

Headquartered in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the 4,500-strong company operates from 30 key national locations and has nearly doubled in size over three years by acquisition. It has diversified to become a major provider of residential energy-efficiency measures for utility companies under the government's Energy Efficiency Commitment. It is also a large and rapidly growing supplier to the social housing sector.

The challenges of growth

Following an enormous surge in growth of the business, along with a need for greater IT resilience, Eaga faced several challenges. These included a dramatic increase in the demand for information storage (partly due to legislation on archiving and larger file sizes, partly as a result of moving Eaga headquarters to a new location). There was also a requirement to simplify backup and improve the availability of data across the organisation.

Graham Tye, Director of IT at Eaga, outlines the predicament:

“Basically we had a wide range of hardware and operating systems that, although reasonably efficient, were relatively old and not delivering optimum performance or a future-proofed way forward. Six hundred users were relying on the system at that point and we couldn't afford to have any downtime.

“We are a relatively small ICT management team, faced with the huge task of carrying out day-to-day functions while also reviewing the ICT infrastructure and coming up with a method of utilising and re-configuring the existing technology in order to future-proof the business. That's when we turned to ITPS for help.”



Customer benefits

- ICT infrastructure now supports over 2,000 users in 23 offices
 - Scalable solution is ready to grow with business expansion and acquisition
 - Failover clustered server technology monitors and repairs network disruptions
 - Energy savings of up to 24% over closest competitor deliver on Eaga's green agenda.
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Information – business lifeblood

Gateshead-based IT Professional Services (ITPS), an IBM Business Partner, provides a range of information technology solutions and support to help companies align people, processes and technology with their strategies and objectives. Its special strengths include business continuity, data storage and backup, and data centre hosting.

Having considered other vendors in a competitive tender process, Eaga chose ITPS to assess requirements, identify the best products for the purpose and transfer knowledge to the Eaga ICT team of some 50 professionals.

ITPS applied its solutions architecture expertise to help Eaga review its existing infrastructure against a set of key parameters. The aim was to build a solid, scalable platform to support the company's ambitious growth plans, specifically by consolidating the servers into a more manageable configuration, and improving resilience and security throughout.

Following an initial consultancy process, ITPS worked with the in-house team to design and implement a solution that met those needs and covered every element of the ICT framework - from intranet and mail services to file, print and database servers – all within a secure environment.

“Our aim is to help our customers understand their business data so that they can make timely and accurate decisions,” says George Galloway, Sales Director at ITPS. “This in turn drives business improvement, reinforces business strategy and encourages the sharing of information – the lifeblood of any organisation.”

Multi-faceted solution

Mapping out Eaga's business processes against the existing framework, ITPS consultants developed a multi-faceted solution based on a series of Intel®-based IBM BladeCenters housed at Eaga headquarters in Newcastle. This is linked to a sophisticated, high-performance storage area network (SAN) designed to make best use of storage space, reduce congestion and eliminate backup traffic from the main network.



“A combination of the high-end industry expertise of ITPS and the business and technical knowledge of our in-house team has resulted in a truly future-proof and resilient solution that will support the business now and in the future.”

– Graham Tye, Director of IT, Eaga Group PLC

By making storage devices available for sharing, the SAN solution creates centralised storage areas accessible to all users. This has the benefit of being cost-effective both in terms of capital spend on hardware, and on rack space and energy and maintenance costs.

The enterprise backup solution, which includes the mail servers, backs up disks straight to tape, connected by fast switches which prevent choke points forming that would slow the network. The result is a secure, highly accessible and resilient storage area for critical business data, with a single point of streamlined backup and storage, and no individual points of failure.

The SAN solution plays a major role in Eaga’s business continuity framework, conferring the ability to quickly recover and restore critical data in the event of disaster. Both the BladeCenters and the SAN are protected by robust and dynamic failover systems, tailored to continually monitor the network and spot any fault or disruption, re-routing and re-allocating resources where necessary, while notifying system administrators that the problem has been dealt with.

Fit for the future

The solution has provided Eaga with a reliable, high-performance ICT infrastructure that now supports over 2,000 users in 23 offices. Failover clustered server technology monitors and repairs network disruptions, while 24% energy savings over its closest competitor help reduce Eaga’s carbon footprint and deliver its green agenda – an obviously significant competitive advantage in the energy-efficiency business.

As Eaga’s rapid business expansion and acquisition continues, the solution is fully scalable and ready to grow with the organisation. Eight months after the start of this complex project, Eaga was extremely satisfied with the results, as Tye explains: “A combination of the high-end industry expertise of ITPS and the business and technical knowledge of our in-house team has resulted in a truly future-proof and resilient solution that will support the business now and in the future.

“Rationalising and re-configuring our existing systems has actually resulted in a much better return on investment, and we have complete faith in an innovative, highly efficient system that delivers significant competitive advantage. We are confident that integrating new acquisitions into the Eaga solution will be a smooth and straightforward process.”

A second important success factor was the smooth collaboration between ITPS and IBM. “We integrated very closely with IBM, and delivering this solution has definitely been a collaborative venture,” says Galloway. “We are able to provide Eaga with the flexibility and personal touch of a nimble systems integrator and solutions provider, supported by the quality assurance and breadth of expertise of the world-class IBM organisation.”

For more information

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