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## Overview

### Customer challenge

Ageing servers and an IT environment that had grown organically over time, meant Specialised Travel's systems were becoming unstable. Regular server reboots and downtime were impacting staff productivity and, ultimately the bottom line.

### Solution

IBM Business Partner, Unilink Systems worked closely with Specialised Travel to design and implement a resilient, consolidated server environment based around IBM BladeCenter® S. Unilink continues to support the solution, which includes high-performing Storage Area Networks (SAN).

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# Specialised Travel

*Discovering resilient systems with IBM BladeCenter solution from Unilink*

Founded in 1955, Specialised Travel Limited (STL) is a private, owner-managed company operating in several carefully chosen niche markets. Many of its offerings have a musical connection and include travel arrangements and tours for orchestras, choirs and ensembles. Currently the company has around 30 employees most of whom work out of an office in West London.

In common with many smaller businesses, STL's IT environment had grown organically over time. Relying on five ageing standalone servers meant the company had experienced a number of system failures and had to carry out regular server reboots. Although, in theory, there was a dedicated Microsoft™ Exchange server, a database server, and a file and print server, in practice boundaries had become blurred as storage requirements expanded. It wasn't always clear which server supported which functions, so users had to close down all their applications every time a reboot was required, seriously impacting productivity.

Faced with a need for a more resilient IT environment, STL began exploring options. The company has no dedicated IT staff of its own, therefore it was important to find a partner able to provide a cost-effective, end-to-end service encompassing initial consultancy, design and implementation through to proactive support and maintenance.

## A new approach

Natasha Burke-Manganaro, Office Manager at Specialised Travel Ltd, has day-to-day responsibility for IT. She explains: "We began investigations with our existing IT partner and, to be honest, we weren't keen to bring in anyone new. Once we met with Unilink, however, we felt differently. We found the company's approach straightforward, proactive and refreshing. Following an initial audit, Unilink proposed an impressive yet cost-effective redesign of our environment which was presented and explained in a jargon-free way that was easy to understand."



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## Customer benefits

- Increased productivity due to improved system resilience
  - Proactive support service coupled with efficient, automatic, overnight data backup reduces business risk
  - Single chassis IBM BladeCenter frees space in the communications room
  - Scalable, flexible solution that is easy upgrade.
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Unilink Systems recommended that STL consolidate its multiple servers into an easier to manage environment based on an IBM BladeCenter S. This provides the capability to host up to six servers combined with a Storage Area Network (SAN). Naveed Sheikh, Senior Account Manager at Unilink Systems says: “With IBM BladeCenter solutions the storage is integrated into the same chassis as the servers. There’s no need to plug in external storage devices, STL only needs one unit so it’s very neat and easy to manage.”

Burke-Manganaro admits: “We hadn’t considered using blade servers as we thought we were way too small for that kind of solution. When Unilink pointed out that IBM offers blade solutions specially tailored to smaller organisations we could see the benefits – it was still something of a leap in the dark for us but we trusted Unilink’s advice.”

## Customer focussed project management

STL’s solution was provided through the Unilink totality service. This offers clients help from start to finish - procuring the hardware, installing and configuring the solution and then providing an affordable and proactive support service designed to ensure that the implementation is running efficiently and effectively.

Implementation took around a month and also included an upgrade of the Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS), replacement of some of the communications equipment and an offsite data backup solution. There were a number of bespoke systems for Unilink’s experts to understand and they also had to liaise with third party software vendors, some of whom are based overseas.

According to Burke-Manganaro: “The implementation was a lot smoother than we expected and very well managed. The project manager was approachable and was onsite everyday. In the past when we’ve implemented new servers we’ve had to pay considerable out of hours engineering costs. Unilink managed the process in order to reduce those costs for us whilst ensuring very little disturbance to our day-to-day business.”

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– Natasha Burke-Manganaro, Office Manager at Specialised Travel Ltd

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STL has been using its new solution for around nine months. “As you would expect with a new solution, we’ve had a couple of blips since installation but our Chairman and Directors are very impressed with how proactively Unilink handle potential problems,” continues Burke-Manganaro. “Generally they detect and deal with issues before our staff notice anything has happened. We feel we get much better value for money on the support side than we did previously because Unilink is so proactive.”

### **Stable systems with growth potential**

For STL, the main benefits of the new solution are the increased levels of stability and resilience it has helped deliver, coupled with a large increase in storage capacity. Server reboots are now automated to happen out of hours and, even if an unscheduled reboot should be required, it is much clearer which functions are affected so staff only need to close down selected applications. Thanks to this new resilience, STL also hopes to see its support costs reduce sharply.

The offsite backup solution runs automatically overnight and is more efficient than STL’s old tape system. As a result, levels of business risk are lower and people no longer have to endure a slow-running system in the morning because a tape backup has overrun.

Burke-Manganaro says: “On a personal level, I have far less day-to-day IT maintenance and tweaking to do. Business-wide we have a great deal of faith in our new solution. It will continue to support the way we work for the next three to five years and, if it needs upgrading, it’s very easy to achieve because everything is integrated into one IBM BladeCenter unit.”

The compact IBM BladeCenter S takes up less space in STL’s communications room than the previous servers and, over time, the company believe its energy efficient design will deliver power savings.

Burke-Manganaro concludes: “Unilink was a great find for us. Its expert recommendations have delivered the benefits promised and everyone involved understood rapidly, not only the technical aspects of our systems, but also the way we work and how to help us avoid the problems that would have a negative impact our business.”

### **For more information**

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