

Fenmarc Improves Agility with Office 365 and Intune



Background

Based in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, Fenmarc produces and packs a large range of prepared vegetables for UK retailers such as Asda, Waitrose, Ocado and Aldi. Established as a farming cooperative some 45 years ago, it now has 200 colleagues and is considered one of the largest suppliers of prepared fresh vegetables in the UK.

Fenmarc is part of Lifecrown Investments which also owns Agellus Hotels, a collection of boutique hotels, gastro pubs and restaurants.

The IT systems and infrastructure for all Lifecrown Investments companies is managed by the Fenmarc IT team.

Challenge

In 2014, Fenmarc negotiated the sale of two parts of its business. As part of the deal, Fenmarc needed to divide the organisation into three and make each of the businesses entirely self-sufficient, with its own sales, orders, distribution, finance and email systems. This presented a tremendous challenge; to split everything into three while ensuring all systems remained fully operational with no downtime. To make things more demanding, the deal was to go through in the New Year, so all preparation needed to be done in confidence and during the run up to Christmas, one of the busiest times of the year for anyone working in the food industry.



Enter EACS...

"We brought in our long-term trusted partner EACS as soon as possible in the process. It was very beneficial to know that we could talk confidentially from the outset and could rely on EACS to deliver within the tight time frames," explained Paul Bower, Head of IT at Fenmarc. "EACS helped us with our email systems and it quickly became obvious that we should move from Microsoft Exchange to Office 365. We wanted to minimise changes for the business and by staying with Microsoft rather than looking at alternatives, we kept continuity for our users with familiar Office applications."

As part of the move to Office 365, Fenmarc also chose Microsoft's cloud-based client management solution Intune to replace Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM). Intune manages Fenmarc's software and anti-virus updates and patches, software and hardware inventory, and includes all mobile devices.

Squeezed timescales

Fenmarc and EACS worked to very short timescales, under tremendous pressure to complete the migration within just four weeks. Due to the confidential nature of the sell-off, it wasn't possible to have EACS on-site during the planning and specification phase. However, as Office 365 is cloud-based, much of the work could be done off-site.

"The main challenge was the sheer enormity of the project and the very short timescales. It was both physically and mentally challenging to maintain focus. Everything had to be planned meticulously, I had three separate project plans which we had to follow to the letter. There was no room for slippage and no opportunity to move tasks around," said Paul.

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Confidence in archiving

EACS had previously implemented Mimecast’s cloud email archiving service for Fenmarc, which really came into its own as the team hit the data migration part of the project.

“With Mimecast, we were able to archive our email data in three separate directions for the three companies. Importantly, this gave us great peace of mind throughout the migration process; we were confident that there would be no data loss,” said Paul.

Timing is everything

The actual migration took place during December and went live on 16th January 2015. However, it was business as usual with production and packing staff working round the clock to meet Christmas deliveries. A team of engineers from EACS worked diligently with Fenmarc throughout the holiday period to meet the January deadline.

Flexible systems for an agile business

Fenmarc now has one instance of Office 365 for the whole Lifecrown Investments group. Data and systems are kept separate using



Sophos firewalls which were also supplied by EACS. The team implemented Intune to manage updates and patches for all devices

With Office 365 and Intune, Fenmarc has a flexible, cloud-based system that can grow and adapt as the organisation continues to evolve in line with market demand. Previously, to set up the IT systems for a new business or divest another would take weeks or even months to complete. Now, Fenmarc knows the same results can be achieved within just a few days.

“Two new hotels have recently been added to the group. We were able to get the systems up and running in just a couple of days – which is a huge advantage and enables us to be much more agile in the market.”

“This is the beauty of Office 365. If we need to divest some parts of the business in the future, we can build a standalone environment and be operational within just a few hours. Again this would have taken weeks or even months previously,” continued Paul.

Easy maintenance and management

“Office 365 and Intune are much easier to manage than our previous combination of Exchange and SCCM. Before, we had twin servers in a virtual environment which was quite complex to manage and required a team of experts in Microsoft Exchange, SCCM and SharePoint.

Now, as the new interfaces are relatively intuitive, we no longer rely on specialists and have freed up the IT team to focus on the wider picture within the business, which is great for professional development,” Paul explained.

Business as usual

Despite the massive transformation taking place behind the scenes, Fenmarc employees were unaware that any changes had taken place.

Paul concluded, “With the help of EACS, we delivered a completely seamless transition between Exchange and Office 365 in a very short timescale at our busiest time of year. Many users did not realise that anything had changed. But that should be the aim of IT. We’re here to provide a service for the business – everything should happen in the background, allowing the users to get on with business as usual.”

Benefits

- Improved business agility, and ability to respond to market opportunities
- Reduced time to set up email systems for new acquisitions from weeks to just days
- Modernised back-office systems to deliver greater business

Microsoft Partner

Gold Cloud Platform
Gold Datacenter
Gold Cloud Productivity
Silver Devices and Deployment

