ROLLING OUT THE CARPET TO PRIVATE CLOUD

When the physical servers supporting multiple companies started to show the wear and tear that comes with age, Headlam came to Sungard AS to lay a new path to a virtual hosted private cloud environment. Now, higher availability and a nearly five-fold increase in performance translates into faster order processing across the entire organisation. Cloud agility also supports Headlam's growth-through-acquisition business model.

SOLUTIONS

- Hosted Private Cloud
- Migration services for legacy-to-cloud transition
- Alert Logic Cloud Defender
- NetBackup for cross-platform data storage
- Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) for Oracle database development

RESULTS

- Increased performance and availability for 24/7 operations
- Financial month-end processing reduced from hours to minutes at many sites
- Resilient infrastructure and 99.99% Service Level Agreement (SLA) reduce business risk
- Cloud agility supports future acquisitions and easy rollout of IT solutions

headlam
group plc

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Headlam Group is Europe's largest floor coverings distributor, providing a distribution channel between manufacturers, suppliers and trade customers. Operating for 28 years, Headlam is comprised of nearly 70 different companies serving a range of businesses, from smaller carpet shops that cater to the residential market to major contractors responsible for meeting the flooring needs of hospitals, schools, airports and other large venues.

> " As we migrated the sites into a Sungard AS private cloud, we had nearly a five-fold increase in processing speed. Our month-end jobs that used to take several hours are now running in minutes and without impacting our business operations."

David Hitchmough
Head of IT, Headlam Group

SUNGARD AVAILABILITY SERVICES®

THE CHALLENGE

In the flooring business, with retail stores and contractors under pressure to fill customer orders, success can come down to processing the highest number of orders in the least amount of time. For the 20 Headlam distribution centres responsible for cutting carpets and shipping stock, and for stocking 50+ trade counters, anything that puts system availability at risk can impact production and profits.

Most of these distribution centres had physical servers supporting the business operations of many Headlam companies across the UK, as well as France, Switzerland and Holland. Although they ran the same bespoke ERP applications—including finance, transport and warehouse management—each site ran localised instances on disparate servers.

David Hitchmough, the company's head of IT, explains the impact this infrastructure had on its round-the-clock business operations. "A number of the servers had reached end-of-life," says Hitchmough. "We run a financial month-end close for all of our companies on the last day of the month. It could take hours at some sites, and basically stopped our warehouse operations because the server infrastructure was so old."

Hitchmough estimates that replacing the IT environment would cost Headlam at least £300,000, just to stay in steady state. "After investigating our options, we realised we could migrate to a Sungard AS private cloud for around the same amount of money and have a more stable, resilient infrastructure behind us."

THE SOLUTION

Today, Headlam's ERP applications run within a cloud-connected infrastructure hub in the Sungard AS London data centre. The virtual environment supports 32 mission-critical services that run Headlam's 24/7 operations across all sites.

Leveraging its experience in managing hybrid IT environments, Sungard AS designed a private cloud solution that could interact seamlessly with the legacy infrastructure. To ease the transition, Sungard AS worked closely with Gould Hall, the third-party company that has supported Headlam's infrastructure and applications for more than 25 years. This also built confidence with the rest of Headlam's IT organisation during such a large IT modernisation project.

The 13-month, site-by-site migration involved transitioning data from 20 physical servers across the UK and Europe. "This was no 'lift and shift' situation," says Hitchmough. "Since these servers constantly exchange information, the communication flow had to continue uninterrupted as we moved to a new virtual environment."

To safely transport data from physical servers to the cloud, Sungard AS set up a VPN that linked to the VPNs already at each site. The dedication of

the Sungard AS team helped to hit the targets set for such a complicated project.

"I was working hard on my side to make sure we hit the final deadline to get all the sites migrated, but we had to change the plan a few times as to which sites we were migrating and when," continues Hitchmough. "My Sungard AS project managers were always there to help me. From the start, they managed the purchase and installation of the hardware, and made sure the migrations went smoothly each weekend. It was reassuring to know they were available to me throughout the entire project."

The first site went live in late 2018, with the rest of the UK sites completed by August 2019. Now, users at these distribution sites access the cloud-based applications via the VPN. The remaining sites across Europe are expected to go live in early 2021.

Adding to the security advantages of a private cloud solution, Cloud Defender from Alert Logic monitors both internal and external network traffic. Data from both virtual and physical servers is backed up daily and stored using NetBackup from Veritas, a Sungard AS partner that provides solutions for multi-platform environments.

THE RESULTS

High performance for higher order volumes

The performance advantages of a modernised IT infrastructure streamline the day-end reporting and backup processes at distribution centres. That translates into decreased downtime and a significant jump in the number of orders processed daily at each center.

However, the most impressive results occur during the month-end close. Before, this process brought order processing, stock movements and carpet cutting to a halt. Things are quite different now.

"As we migrated the sites into a Sungard AS private cloud, we had nearly a five-fold increase in processing speed," Hitchmough reports. "Our month-end jobs that used to take several hours now run in minutes, without impacting our business operations."

Increased availability supports next-day delivery

With a 99.99% SLA, Headlam knows it can count on the cloud to support its just-in-time delivery model. This is especially important to meeting the needs of customers in the residential market, including the independent retailers and flooring contractors who represent most of the company's business. Many lack the warehouse space to store flooring for pending jobs.

"Our residential customers rely on us to store carpet or flooring and have it ready for them, so our next-day service offering is critical," Hitchmough explains. "The stable and resilient systems we have in place now increase our ability to have an order ready for them just when they need it."

Previously, a system failure required Headlam's IT provider to transport another physical server to the impacted site. If a server went down, it could stop business operations for nearly a day. Now, a managed backup solution and a virtual cloud environment with a four-hour SLA means recovery can happen much faster.

Cloud speeds new business onboarding

Acquisition is a chief growth driver for Headlam. While absorbing the IT operations of a new business into the company's own environment is a complex process, the new cloud environment streamlines integration.

"My role is to introduce the right technologies to move us forward," says Hitchmough. "Part of that is to speed up the onboarding process for newly acquired businesses, so we can get them up and running quickly. A lot of data needs to be extracted from their systems and converted into ours. The speed of the cloud servers has made a big difference in how quickly we can turn that data around. And, we can bring these companies on remotely, without the need to travel."

A foundation of trust

Since the initial cloud transition, Headlam extended the environment to add storage for business intelligence projects, and servers to support Oracle database development. As part of its five-year transformation project, the company is also launching a testing and training site with a new look and feel for its ERP applications. Sungard AS will remain a key player in the transition.

"I'm used to working with hosting partners, centralised help desks and support teams, so I know what to expect from an IT provider," says Hitchmough. "Sungard AS very quickly became a trusted partner. Their account management structure organises support when I need it, escalates any issues to the right team, chases the answers for me and provides monthly reviews and updates. I can call them anytime I need to, and they'll respond. Sungard AS does everything I expect from a service provider – and does it well."

In closing, Hitchmough offers this advice to other companies contemplating a transition to the cloud: "It's been a well-managed journey for us and I'm very grateful for the support I've received," he says. "Sungard AS is a safe pair of hands, and you can trust in their abilities."

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>
> **David Hitchmough** | *Head of Information Technology, Headlam Group*

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