INDUSTRY
Law

HEADQUARTERS
Manchester and London

WEBSITE
www.blmlaw.com

OBJECTIVE
BLM needed a solution which would enable the IT team to be more responsive to business needs and support business growth, while ensuring constant availability of critical legal documents and a secure disaster recovery solution.

SOLUTION
BLM worked with leading cloud infrastructure and Disaster Recovery specialists Techgate to migrate its business critical applications to a high availability private cloud built on a VMware vSphere platform at Techgate's data centres in Essex and Hertfordshire, one of which acts as a fail-over site for disaster recovery managed by VMware Site Recovery Manager.

BLM

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Law Firm Preps for Growth with Move to Private Cloud Infrastructure

BLM, a leading UK law firm, has migrated its mission critical infrastructure to an off-premise, high availability private cloud, built on VMware's product stack and managed by cloud infrastructure and Disaster Recovery specialists Techgate. As a result, BLM has experienced a significant saving in resources, both in finances and man-hours, as well as offering its staff a more reliable and robust IT infrastructure.

BLM is a leading risk and insurance law firm with head offices in Manchester and London, UK. The firm has a workforce of over 1,600 people, spread over nine offices in the UK and Ireland.

Organisational challenges

BLM is a fast growing law firm, it has experienced continual growth over the past 15 years, tripling its workforce as well as nearly doubling the number of offices across the UK. This rapid growth and physical expansion led to an increasingly complex IT infrastructure – and in turn a higher OPEX - needed to run the firm's key business applications, products and services, as well as the day-to-day office operations of BLM's lawyers.

The key objective for BLM was to move its core infrastructure to a more secure and optimised data centre location, where it could be effectively and securely managed, whilst providing space for rapid expansion.

Darren Broughton, Infrastructure Manager at BLM explained: "As we continued to grow in size, it became clear that our on-premise IT hosting facilities were no longer suitable. We began to experience challenges in simply maintaining the infrastructure. Over the last few years we have several significant outages, generally as a result of power supply or air conditioning failures. It became very clear that we were spending too much time and resource on maintaining our ageing environment."

Not only was BLM's IT system held back by costs, but the physical size of the server rooms was also becoming an issue:

"The organisation was continuing to expand but with the space available for IT infrastructure we simply wouldn't have been able to keep pace."

Additionally, the business was looking at launching a new Document Management System (DMS) which would be used by the entire company. Rather than go through the costly rigmarole of investing in and installing further physical infrastructure the IT department decided to look for a more cost-effective solution: "We wanted to increase the speed of our system and reduce the administrative burden of setting up new servers and applications for the DMS. We needed IT to be the business enabler, but our old IT infrastructure meant we were a cost drain and not flexible for us to help the business to grow," continued Broughton.

Also important to BLM was the ability to comprehensively protect all its critical applications and data in a flexible and safe environment. The limited physical space at the firm's offices meant that providing a disaster recovery (DR) environment in-house, whilst also meeting the rapid expansion requirements, was simply not an option.

Broughton commented: "It quickly became clear that we needed to create a dedicated off-site location to house our core infrastructure. One which could remove the costs and complexities of

Techgate plc

"As the business continued to expand, it became clear that we would soon outgrow our current IT estate. Increasing the on-premise system was no longer an option, not only due to a lack of space, but also the increasingly difficult task of ensuring that the physical servers were able to be maintained. Moving to a private cloud solution provides more physical room for expansion and has allowed us to refocus our resources on more innovative projects that can help our business grow. Additionally, using a dual data centre system has meant our technology estate is now more resilient than ever before."

Darren Broughton,
Infrastructure Manager, BLM

managing our own physical IT stack and help us to guarantee maximum uptime."

The solution

In order to meet BLM's needs, the firm's IT team embarked on a server migration project in partnership with Managed Services provider Techgate. This saw the firm's critical business applications migrated to a high availability private cloud built on the VMware platform at Techgate's data centres in Essex and Hertfordshire.

Broughton explained: "We had already virtualised around three-quarters of our existing on premise infrastructure with VMware, so we were very familiar with the IT environment. But more importantly, we considered VMware to be a very trusted vendor and the best of breed hypervisor for our infrastructure."

BLM's IT team looked into five Managed Service providers: "Techgate proved to be the most flexible, offering a design with VMware that was built exactly as per our specification and requirement. Having a hands-on team at Techgate took away a lot of the administration of setting up a new environment and because our existing infrastructure was already virtualised, it was very easy to migrate the virtual machines over to the new locations."

Key to the migration process was offering BLM's entire staff access to the newly deployed DMS application, which the firm's lawyers and technical experts rely on for the file sharing and electronic storage of critical documents.

BLM is now running a high availability hybrid cloud stretched between two data centres, with VMware Site Recovery Manager (SRM) playing an integral part in enabling automated failover between the two sites for DR purposes.

Since this migration, both Techgate sites have been added to BLM's network so that the IT team can migrate applications seamlessly from their on-premise platform to the Techgate Private Cloud without intervention from Techgate. The virtualization of servers both at BLM and at Techgate has enabled a smooth integration between the two cloud environments and the scaling required.

Broughton added: "Currently we have moved around 80 per cent of our IT

infrastructure over to Techgate's data centres and our strategy is to prioritise and migrate applications that make sense to be moved out of our premises and to move DR to the cloud with Techgate ."

Business results and benefits

By moving its core IT infrastructure to Techgate on VMware, BLM has been able to support business growth while enabling the rapid launch of new business services.

"Previously we would need to spend time monitoring and maintaining our IT environment, but now, we can respond much more quickly to business demands from our lawyers, meaning we're providing a better service to BLM's clients. And when we do need more infrastructure, we can simply request additional memory and storage from Techgate, or spin up new VMware hosts in accordance with business demand, rather than manually installing more servers in our limited on-premise locations.

"Mitigating the cost of maintenance including expensive floor space, power and cooling has also brought us considerable cost savings, while handing over the day to day management of our IT infrastructure to Techgate has freed up an incredible amount of time. This has enabled us to focus on more innovative and strategic projects including various application rollouts and upgrading our Domain controllers to all sites."

BLM has also been able to create a formal DR strategy, protecting the workloads and applications in an automated way to ensure a seamless recovery using VMware's SRM component. "With Techgate's help we have developed a hybrid solution between our on-premise site and Techgate's data centres. Adding some legacy hardware and public cloud platforms to our network means our core business applications are now virtually risk-free of outages and centrally managed. This cutting edge capability is delivered from new applications that we can implement quickly and confidently on the cloud platform.

"We have not had to use SRM to date as the service uptime on the production platform has been 100%, however the fully automated SRM failover and failback process was rigorously tested prior to going live and we are fully confident of the solution."

BUSINESS IMPACT

- IT can now support business growth; enabling the rapid launch of new businesses services and therefore client satisfaction

- This growth is no longer restricted by space, with Techgate's data centre facilities providing a flexible platform for expansion

- Migrating the cost and time of maintenance including floor space, power and general monitoring of equipment has delivered considerable financial savings whilst freeing up the IT team's time to work on more innovative and strategic projects

- BLM now has a formal DR strategy, ensuring client data is constantly backed up and highly available

SOLUTIONS USED

- VMware vCloud Suite

- VMware DRS (Distributed Resource Scheduler)

- VMware SRM (Site Recovery Manager)

- VMware HA (High Availability)

- VMware vSphere

VMware High Availability, also part of the vCloud Suite, has also provided high levels of availability of many of the firm's critical business applications. "Being able to respond to our clients quickly and efficiently is absolutely vital for client satisfaction and ultimately the reputation of the business, so we need 24/7 access to client files and internal documents. In the rare event that we do have a physical host failure, affected virtual machines are automatically restarted on other production servers with spare capacity, meaning that our lawyers will see absolutely no interruption to their work."

Next steps

"This really is a long term project for BLM and as we continue to expand, we want to move as much of our core data into the Techgate cloud as possible."

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