

CASE STUDY

THE MIDCOUNTIES CO-OPERATIVE MODERNISE THE WAY THEY WORK WITH HELP FROM CDW



OVERVIEW

- The Midcounties Co-operative wanted to standardise the disparate, on-premises IT services that had grown across its business units over the previous two decades.
- CDW, in partnership with Microsoft, developed a new licensing agreement, created a roadmap for the deployment of the Microsoft 365 suite and provided consultancy, support and adoption services.
- The consolidated solution led to cost avoidance of **£2 million** while enhancing productivity, collaboration and security among employees. It has also provided a future-proof platform powered by cloud services.

ABOUT THE MIDCOUNTIES CO-OPERATIVE

- The largest independent Co-operative in the UK, based in the Midlands and covering many areas of central England.
- Has a workforce of **8,000** employees based in **309** food retail and post office outlets, **44** childcare facilities, **30** healthcare facilities, **60** travel outlets, **85** funeral care sites and head offices offering services including energy, communications and flexible benefits.
- Annual turnover of **£1.4 billion**.
- Serving a customer base that includes over **700,000** members.

CHALLENGE

IT services at The Midcounties Co-operative were based on a disparate collection of technologies assembled over many years of expansion. Working with an array of IT suppliers, different business units within the organisation had deployed a varying range of solutions that were predominantly hosted on-premises, and applications were managed in-house according to individual needs. There was a diverse spread of third-party support arrangements in place, some of which had expired.

Additionally, there was a lack of standardisation across all layers of the Open Systems Interconnection (OSI) stack, from networking, servers and data storage through to applications and end-user interfaces. This was restricting efficiency and collaboration across the business as well as complicating overall IT operations.

At the same time, The Midcounties Co-operative had accumulated a large number of licensing agreements. Microsoft technologies were fundamental to the organisation, however, the licensing position required in-depth observation to ensure the most cost-effective arrangements. This was crucial to meeting evolving needs and extracting maximum value from the available tools.

Upon joining the organisation, Aaron Clayton, Chief Technology Officer at The Midcounties Co-operative, and the senior IT team developed an IT strategy that introduced greater standardisation while continuing to provide individual business units with the specific solutions they required. "The strategy was developed around a simple statement – to be as standard as possible and as diverse as required," he says. "Looking at the entire OSI stack, our goal was simplification, which meant locating and implementing solutions best suited to our organisation's needs. We wanted to move from on-premises towards a cloud-based solution and address concerns around back-up and recovery."

SOLUTION

In order to modernise, The Midcounties Co-operative enlisted the help of CDW to conduct a review of the organisation's current estate. Drawing from its expertise as a Microsoft Gold Partner with an established status within the Microsoft community, CDW proposed a new Enterprise Subscription Agreement (ESA) that would provide comprehensive coverage and compliance.

CDW consulted with Microsoft to establish the most cost-effective solution, based on an assessment of usage and bringing all previous licences under one single agreement. The cost avoidance totalled **£2 million** over the three-year period of the agreement. However, the added value was that the Co-operative could also access new apps and services, as well as establishing an upgrade path for future evolution.

Jonathan Eyton-Williams, Director, Solutions – International at CDW, says: “Having worked from an ageing Exchange platform that was nearing its end-of-support deadline, it was crucial that The Midcounties Co-operative upgraded its estate. Microsoft 365 was clearly the right solution for the organisation and CDW developed an agreement that delivered consolidation as well as substantial cost savings.”

The Integrated Technology Team at CDW worked with The Midcounties Co-operative to implement the most relevant and up-to-date software. Upon reaching the renewal period, CDW then recommended a migration to Microsoft 365, which moved them from on-premises provision, to a cloud-based model. This enabled them to establish a standard set of IT services across the organisation and delivered a more scalable platform to handle increasing business demands. The migration also led to improved business continuity and strengthened the organisation's disaster recovery capabilities.

Modernisation of working practices also became possible. With Microsoft 365 and an associated VDI solution, The Midcounties Co-operative introduced agile and flexible working options for employees needing to access services remotely. In parallel, collaboration tools have been scaled up with the roll

out of a new SharePoint platform. Future plans to harness Microsoft Teams and Skype for Business are also in progress.

The introduction of greater flexibility was underpinned by new security measures including multi-factor authentication. Working with CDW, the Co-operative has strengthened data encryption with Microsoft Azure Information Protection and introduced Microsoft Intune to provide non-intrusive security for mobile devices with single sign-on.

Exemplifying its end-to-end services, CDW also deployed its Microsoft adoption team specialists to provide bespoke guidance materials for users and on-boarding assistance as employees at the Co-operative adjusted to the new platforms.

OUTCOME

Consolidation of IT suppliers has reduced pressure on IT professionals and presented important financial efficiencies.

“Cost-effectiveness is a clear benefit but it's also about adhering to our principles of inclusivity, ensuring members and employees are supported,” says Aaron. “We now feel correctly equipped for the size of business we have become.”

The savings realised by the new Microsoft ESA agreement enabled the Co-operative's IT team to proceed with its modernisation project, as well as opening up access to new apps and services to be leveraged in future.

Having a standardised deployment of Microsoft 365 is highly beneficial, says Aaron. “A key advantage of Microsoft is that it is a global recognised standard. It means everyone can interact and sharing of documents presents no issues. The core software suite and OS are combined in a package for everybody and functionality is enhanced throughout. It keeps us where we need to be in the business world.”

The introduction of OneDrive has also been enthusiastically embraced by employees, who are now sharing links rather than emailing entire documents, as well as enjoying the advantages of stronger document control and security at the same time.

“It is not just a technology adjustment but a cultural shift too,” says Aaron. “We are introducing new thought processes and working patterns that were not possible prior to the new solution. Senior executives are advising me that they have identified improvements in productivity and interaction, which is more flexible and easier to follow.”

Jonathan Eyton-Williams, Director, Solutions – International at CDW, says: “This project is an outstanding example of CDW's end-to-end services and Microsoft expertise. It has been a pleasure working with The Midcounties Co-operative, from solving their fundamental licensing challenges, right through to

technology roll-out and support.”

The support of CDW's adoption team has also been crucial in helping employees adapt to the new technologies. “Evolving from 25+ years of relative freedom in terms of technology adoption into a modern, standardised Microsoft environment was no small step, and being able to provide a real hand-holding experience, with the help of CDW, was immensely valuable. The collaboration between CDW and our in-house teams has been key to our success.”

A series of surveys to measure satisfaction levels among employees showed scores of over **75%** in key areas such as preparation and support.

The use of Microsoft Azure has removed the headache of capacity planning. “The capacity is there when we need it,” says Aaron. What's more, further expansion into Azure is planned for the future. “We have a huge programme of change around digitalisation and e-commerce and it will be vital for us to have resources that can grow as required,” he says.

The loss of online services that occurred in one part of the business three years ago, caused by an unprecedented surge in demand following a recommendation from a prominent journalist, would no longer occur, says Aaron.

“It makes sense to look at cost-effective provisioning. We are an agile business and we want to stay that way. We can't afford to wait for a data centre to come online, so we now create virtual servers at the turn of a key and we have full visibility of the true cost. I can give precise costs to a COO, in terms of licensing, networking, servers and so on, if they want to employ an additional 100 people.”

He also pays tribute to the central role of CDW. “I'm pleased to work with CDW and I would strongly recommend them as a trusted IT partner that will work with a customer to find the best solution for their business needs,” he says. “Their expertise, ethics, professionalism and support are excellent.”



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– Aaron Clayton, Chief Technology Officer at The Midcounties Co-operative

For more information or to discuss your requirements, speak to CDW:

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