

HP consolidation gives Sage UK the agility to embrace change



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Steve Leggetter, IS director, Sage UK





Customer at a glance:

Industry sector: Business management software

Name: Sage UK

Headquarters: Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Founded: 1981

Telephone: +44 (0)191 294 3000

Number of employees: 1,500

Annual revenues: £560.3 million.

€840.6 million

URL: www.sage.co.uk

Formed in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, in 1981, Sage has grown into a household name and is now a world leading supplier of business management software and related services for small to medium sized enterprises.

Over 500,000 UK companies and 4.3 million business users worldwide rely on its range of software products which includes programs to support accounting, payroll, personnel, customer relationship management (CRM) and many other business functions.

Sage UK is based in the company's home town of Newcastle. Having grown rapidly in recent years and still experiencing year-on-year growth in both revenue and profits, Sage UK has an estate of 200 servers which run a multitude of CRM systems, ERP, intranet, email and many other additional services that support the company's R&D staff. Over 60 per cent of those servers are HP machines, predominantly ProLiant DL360 G1, G2 and G3 models together with some ProLiant DL380.

PC legacy

A subset of that server estate consisted of 30 desktop PCs racked along one side of Sage's server room where they took up a lot of space. Delivering a wide variety of functions to many different parts of the organisation, the PCs were a threat to the company's efficient operation because if just one fan went down then the whole service could go with it.

So, when Sage planned to move to new, purpose built premises on the outskirts of Newcastle it was the ideal time for a re-think and HP was called in to suggest and implement a server consolidation project.

"Going to the new premises gave us the opportunity to design a new building from scratch, particularly surrounding the hosting of our environments on our

servers and it made sense to transfer the services running on the PCs to servers," said IS director at Sage UK, Steve Leggetter.

Virtual solution

Sage put out a competitive bid procedure for server consolidation and in the face of opposition from other major players, HP was engaged with a recommendation that included two HP ProLiant DL580 G3 Servers running VMware(r) ESX Server(tm) software and connected to a new HP StorageWorks EVA3000 SAN (Storage Area Network). The equipment was provided by HP reseller, SCC.

Now an EMC company, VMware was founded to bring mainframe class virtual machine technology to industry standard computers. Its ESX Server product provides virtual infrastructure software for partitioning, consolidating and managing systems in mission critical environments. Creating a cost effective and highly scalable virtual machine platform it provides advanced resource management capabilities and by running directly on the hardware it offers a secure, uniform platform for easy deployment, management and remote control of other operating systems.

An important part of the Sage solution was VMotion(r) which allows fast reconfiguration and optimisation of resources across the virtual infrastructures because you can make changes on the fly. This means that you can migrate a virtual running machine to a different physical server connected to the same SAN without service interruption resulting in zero downtime and enabling the underlying hardware and storage to be serviced without disrupting user sessions.

Also included was VMware VirtualCenter virtual infrastructure management software which provides

a central point of control for all virtual server resources, allowing faster reconfiguration and reallocation of applications and services. This delivers instant provisioning of virtual servers and enables continuous workload management and business continuity.

"We went with HP for very practical reasons - because of the familiarity we already had with its hardware and ease of integration with our existing enterprise management toolkits. We knew we could plug the HP hardware in amongst all our other hardware and we already carried spares," added Leggetter. "We have a history with HP going back two and a half years and felt that the ProLiant DL580 servers were a good balance of power to cost ratio.

"We also saw that by using VMware we would be able to introduce new services much more quickly and a lot more cheaply than we normally would. In addition we can use the monitoring tools that come with VMware to identify performance issues and allocate more resources to improve service delivery."

Invaluable consultancy

The HP engagement included 30 days consultancy and integration from HP Services which was considered 'invaluable' by Sage. It also involved the migration of various applications to the new servers. These included Microsoft SQL for database management and analysis; the powerful Web server Microsoft IIS (Internet Information Services) which provides a highly reliable and scalable Web application infrastructure; Microsoft File & Print functions and the Microsoft Windows Server 2003 terminal server. In addition, the migration also included various CRM (Customer Relationship Management) systems and other in-house applications used by Sage.

"There was really good knowledge transfer from HP Services," added Leggetter. "This is largely new technology and there was a lot of hesitancy from

our staff. It was a step into the unknown as to whether it was going to deliver what they had read about. HP Services became part of the team to help us deliver the project and they effected the handover very well."

The SAN enables Sage to manage the capacity of its storage much more effectively, with reserves that can be diverted to whichever service requires them and Sage is already expanding it.

While HP Consulting staff were working with them, Sage also took the opportunity to use their expertise to migrate operating systems from Windows NT to Windows 2000/2003.

Synchronised IT

The new HP solution has made Sage a more Adaptive Enterprise that has synchronised its business and IT to allow it to capitalise on change.

"Sage is a company of growth and now we are expanding in ways we had not foreseen," concluded Leggetter. "When staff ask for new facilities that can really add value to the business we can now provide them within hours rather than weeks.

"We can schedule downtime without taking down the service and we have been able to take off those 30 PCs and put the applications onto servers that are the size of just two desktop PCs, complete with dual fans and dual power.

"HP took the time to understand the pressures and demands of our business, talking to us at a very strategic high level but also deploying people with deep technical and change management skills on the ground.

"They turned their proposal into a reality very easily and the result has made it much easier for Sage to keep up with rapid growth and change. Our new architecture from HP has allowed us to bypass the next two levels of change in the business and position ourselves so that we can be a lot more adaptable to that change," concluded Leggetter.

Partner

Company: VMware

Headquarters: EMEA HQ Frimley, UK

Telephone: +44 (0)1276 804500

Number of employees: 600+

URL: www.vmware.com

Business: VMware is the global leader in virtual infrastructure software for x86-based systems.

Products: VMware VirtualCenter, VMware ESX Server, VMware GSX Server, VMware Workstation





Why HP?

- Sage already had a large estate of HP servers and was a satisfied HP customer.
- Buying HP would bring many practical benefits such as ease of integration and technology standardisation.
- HP ProLiant DL servers provided a good balance of power and cost effectiveness.

Hardware

- 3 x HP ProLiant DL580 G3 Servers each with 4 x 2.8GHz/2Mb processors and 8Gb RAM managed with integrated Lights Out technology
- HP StorageWorks EVA 3000 SAN initially scaled at 500Gb but later increased to 3Tb capacity

Software

- VMware ESX Server
- VMware VirtualCenter
- VMotion
- Windows 2000/2003

HP Services

- Consulting and Integration services
- Licence management services

Challenge

- Leading business management software publisher, Sage UK, relies on its server estate to run many business applications including those that support its R&D staff.
- A weak link in Sage's server efficiency was a rack of 30 PCs that delivered a variety of services but were bulky and non-resilient.
- When Sage decided to move to new purpose built premises, it was the ideal time for a re-think.

Solution

- Following a bid procedure, Sage engaged HP who formulated a server and storage consolidation plan.
- This transferred service previously run on the PCs to two HP ProLiant DL Servers running VMware ESX Server and VirtualCenter and connected to an HP StorageWorks storage area network.
- HP Services provided 'invaluable' consulting and integration work and also arranged the migration of vital applications used by Sage.

Results

- The new solution is more resilient and enables Sage IS staff to provide new facilities much more easily, quickly and cheaply.
- Free capacity means that upgrade and maintenance work can be pre-planned without service disruption.
- This has made Sage a much more agile company, able to capitalise on change and continue its impressive growth.

For more information on how working with HP can benefit you, please contact your local HP sales representative or reseller, or visit www.hp.com.

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