

Focus IT helps leading online travel agency maintain their critical network infrastructure

Sometimes, as an organisation grows its IT partner is not able to grow with it. This can cause real problems, as in the first instance they are unable to obtain the support that an expanding business needs and secondly, they are then faced with the disruption of finding a new partner. Fortunately, this has not been the case for On the Beach.

Founded in 1995 in Macclesfield, On the Beach is one of the UK's leading online travel agencies, now carrying over 500,000 passengers every year. They do not sell package holidays, but allow customers to choose any flight or hotel singly or together to suit their requirements. They offer value for money flights and hotels to the world's most popular beach holiday destinations, providing consumers with a huge selection of travel products, from 50 million available flight seats and more than 30,000 hotels around the world, insurance and in-resort transfer partners.

Being Macclesfield based, they had approached Focus IT in 2003 to act as their support partner, as Anna Dick, Head of IT at On the Beach explained. "We were looking for a local company that could provide all the support we needed, as we did not have any internal IT staff, nor did we want to recruit any going forward. Focus IT met our requirements exactly."

Supporting the network infrastructure

Since that time the business has continued to grow and now employs more than 150 staff in a new location in Didsbury, Manchester. Focus IT has looked after the network infrastructure during this time, as Harry Edwards, Managing Director of Focus IT outlined.

"On the Beach's network infrastructure is based around Windows Server 2003 and Exchange Server 2007, with some 160+ workstations and 5 physical servers. We ensure that this is up and running and provide first-level support to all the IT issues raised by their users that are not related to On the Beach's Web site.

"In addition we also host a disaster recovery site at our data centre in Hulme. This ensures that should an unplanned event occur, On the Beach will be able to recover their IT network very quickly, minimising the disruption to their day-to-day business."



Remote monitoring and management

To ensure that the system is kept at the peak of efficiency, Focus IT uses remote management tools to continually monitor the network and keep protection up to date. "This automates many daily, weekly and monthly IT tasks and ensures that they can be completed and reported consistently and without fail", said Harry.

"As the tasks run, valuable data is gathered that spots trends and patterns. This can then be used to plan system changes or enhancements. Such information helps to reduce the impact of any changes on the business."

As part of the service, Focus IT provides Anna with a regular network health report. "This details everything that has occurred with regard to the network as well as outlining the status of all the support calls we have made", said Anna. "It is all important information that is invaluable in helping us run the network on a day-to-day basis as well as plan for the future."

Ensuring maximum up time for critical servers

For a company that is highly dependent on its IT network as On the Beach, this pre-emptive approach to maintenance is vital in ensuring maximum uptime, as any downtime for critical servers can mean lost revenue. The monitoring covers:

- Disk capacity
- Event log auditing and management
- Patch management
- Disk management and defrag
- Software licence auditing and compliance
- Checking the integrity of data backups

"The level of service provided by this method is much more cost-effective than us recruiting staff full-time to do the job", said Anna. "It means I can focus on managing the relationship with Focus IT and ensuring that everything runs smoothly."

Supporting business growth

"We perform the functions an internal IT department would normally carry out", said Harry. "But, we are able to do it much more cost-effectively and with a greater depth of experience and expertise."

"The two companies have grown together", concluded Anna. "This has enabled a good understanding to develop between us and ensures that we always get a high level of service. Over the years Focus IT has always been very proactive and efficient and this has ensured that our IT infrastructure has been able to support the business as it grew."

"What I like most about them is that they are a 'can-do' organisation. This is very important to us as that is the ethos on which we have grown On the Beach. We want our technology investment to be an enabler that underpins this growth rather than a limiter to our future success."

"I have no doubt that they will be able to support us well into the future as we continue to grow."