



Emprise Services plc's Disparate IT System is Consolidated and Centralised Bringing Multiple Offices and Remote Workers Together

oncore IT Enables Stress-Free Office Expansions for Emprise and Business Continuity through Centralised Disaster Recovery Programme

About Emprise

Established in 1986, Emprise (www.emprise.co.uk) is an independent support services company offering a range of integrated services built around a core offering of cleaning and security. Emprise has enjoyed consistent growth for the past twenty one years and has a turnover in excess of £60 million and employs over 5,000 colleagues delivering services to clients on a national basis. Due to the localised nature of the business and being a national operation, Emprise has offices throughout the UK, as well as many remote workers and laptop users, who all need secure and reliable access to the company network at all times.

However, this expansion was putting a strain on the operations of the legacy IT system. The growth of the business had led to a labyrinth of functional but aging and disparate sets of servers connected to a complicated network infrastructure. As a result of this, Emprise was experiencing unreliable communication lines with multiple points of failure, inducing periods of downtime and costing the business in terms of wasted man hours and expensive license fees for hardware and software. Opening up a new office or re-locating as the business grows would involve creating an entirely new set of servers, data centre and connections at the new location, involving great expense and time.

Mark Mitchell, IT Manager of Emprise, states:

"We are more productive, with improved communications - both internal and external - and everyone is able to respond to clients more efficiently."

The Need for Greater Efficiency & Less Downtime

Emprise therefore needed to consolidate its IT infrastructure and minimise downtime in order to free up time for IT colleagues to concentrate on business-led application development and to lower costs in terms of: server administration; hardware and software licenses; and fault detection and resolution. Emprise would also benefit from a centralised IT system that would negate the need for buying in new servers and communication links every time a new office is opened.

Backing up the company data on a regular basis was also proving to be an inefficient and cumbersome task. As the existing backup solution was tape-based, this required a different backup administrator at each of the office locations to manually carry out the backup of each server on a daily basis. Retrieving lost data would take days, as the tape needed to be transported back to the office and sometimes the retrieved data would be corrupted and therefore irretrievable. A centralised, online and automated backup solution that would carry out more regular backups and store the data securely in an offsite and centralised data centre, with the data replicated to another data centre for additional security, was therefore needed to resolve the data protection and retrieval issues for Emprise.

Emprise decided to outsource for these IT requirements and selected oncore IT to address every part of the IT system, from consolidating the servers and centralising the network, to carrying out daily online data backups using Asigra software and providing all encompassing IT infrastructure and desktop support.

Mark Mitchell, IT Manager of Emprise, recalls: "oncore IT offered us the most comprehensive IT solution and provided us with reassurance through the feedback from their existing customers."

oncore IT addresses our IT issues from a strategic business perspective, looking for the best way to maximise efficiency.”

The Solution: Consolidation and Centralisation

At the start of the implementation in December 2005, oncore IT refreshed and consolidated all server hardware for Emprise. There were four geographically dispersed sets of servers around the UK. Now there is only one set of servers and every colleague from every location in the UK - even remote laptop users - is working off one central terminal server. The five new servers each serve a different central function for the entire business: File & Print server; Accounts server; Terminal server; Application server; and a Microsoft Exchange server. oncore IT has also provided Emprise with BlackBerry software and has installed 75 BlackBerry handsets to enable more effective communication on the move.

Mark Mitchell continues: “With the introduction of the central terminal server and the BlackBerry handsets, our communications have improved significantly and the ease of access to information has increased considerably.”

oncore IT used the power of Microsoft's Terminal Services across the group of servers and centralised the upgraded servers into one data centre interconnected by an MPLS (Multi-Protocol Label Switching) network. From a mixture of Windows NT 4 and Windows 2000, oncore IT upgraded all servers and the domain to leverage Microsoft's new Active Directory. By implementing the thin client environment based upon Microsoft Windows 2003, Terminal Server users now access their many lines of business applications, from the centralised data centre (see Diagram 1 for an illustration of the new IT system).

David Ebsworth, Head of Technology at oncore IT stated: “It is more economical to pay for one high quality terminal server to serve all offices than it is to buy in mediocre servers at multiple sites. Many servers also means expensive licenses. High quality hardware and software centrally deployed in a simplified network infrastructure will result in reducing long term costs and higher business productivity, every time.”

Furthermore, in order to minimise the PC faults that were causing downtime and affecting the productivity of Emprise colleagues, oncore IT decided to reconfigure and lockdown all the desktop PCs at Emprise to have uniform policy settings and applications according to industry best practice. Having knowledge of the underlying configuration of each PC allows oncore IT to more quickly hone in on possible faults and also minimises the misuse of the PCs and unauthorised access. Users can't change the settings that could cause problems.

Ongoing IT Services from oncore IT

oncore IT now provides Emprise with a total outsourced IT support service using its highly effective and successful PReSS (Proactive Remote Engineering Support Service) IT network management system. PReSS is at the heart of all of oncore IT's highly innovative managed IT services and provides continuous and proactive system monitoring, fault identification, alerting and resolution services 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. PReSS incorporates a full call logging and escalation process that ensures any IT problem detected is immediately logged and then constantly tracked through the system until it has been resolved by the NOC team (Network Operations Centre) in accordance with Emprise's SLA. The system has been designed to be completely 'transparent' in that it will allow full access by nominated colleagues at Emprise to view all support activity undertaken by oncore IT. This feature further ensures that oncore IT is indeed meeting its service levels. In addition to the core PReSS system, oncore IT also provides Emprise with a wide range of its other key managed services, including a secure socket layer virtual private network service (SSL-VPN), email filtering to prevent spam, intrusion and viruses (Email Defence), online backup and recovery (OLB) and a disaster recovery service (DRS).

The oncore IT SSL-VPN provides Emprise colleagues working remotely with secure network access to the terminal server from anywhere in the UK. It consists of a recognised industry-standard set of network security features, which ensures only authorised users have remote access to the internal network from the public Internet. Being able to securely access company data from any location enables Emprise colleagues to work on the move, resulting in greater productivity and a more flexible work ethos.

Disaster Recovery: Tried and Tested

To enable true business continuity for Emprise in the event of data loss, whether it is an entire set of servers that has gone down or just one misplaced file or email, oncore IT provides Emprise with its on-line data back-up service (OLB), based upon Asigra's award-winning data protection software technology, in conjunction with the oncore IT disaster recovery service (DRS).

As Emprise now has a single datacentre in which all company data from every branch office/remote office is stored, it is now able to benefit from oncore IT's OLB service, which automatically backs up newly created or amended data every night from the Emprise datacentre location (Datacentre 1) to the oncore IT datacentre (Datacentre 2), where oncore IT employs a fully resilient data back-up vault. For an added layer of security, oncore IT runs a duplicate and highly secure offshore vault near Paris containing a second full copy of all stored data, which acts as oncore IT's own back-up contingency. As the service is online and fully encrypted from the moment it leaves the Emprise network, it is much easier, quicker and safer to store and, if ever required, restore.

Should an Emprise office suffer a major catastrophe such as fire, flood, prolonged mains power failure or be denied access to its offices for whatever reason, oncore IT will invoke its DR plan and will begin the restore of Emprise's entire system (if necessary) onto transportable standby server equipment contained within oncore IT's NOC. Once this restore is complete, the standby equipment can be shipped to a location within the UK as specified by Emprise.

As part of the DR plan, oncore IT performs a complete Test Data Restore at the oncore IT data centre on an annual basis to ensure that should Emprise suffer a real catastrophe or major IT Systems failure, oncore IT has the proven ability to fully recover the systems and data in the agreed time scales. The first Test Data Restore for Emprise took place on 3rd October 2006. Using the OLB solution, the test involved restoring data from the backup sets, so there was no need to interfere with the live data in use by Emprise personnel. The Trial Data Restore was a huge success, in terms of recovering all the data and within a short timeframe, with one server being fully restored in just under one hour.

Oncore IT carried out another Trial Data Restore for Emprise at the end of June 2007. This was completed successfully, with all of the data being retrieved and within the specified time period.

The Results

Mark Mitchell concludes: "We are more productive, with improved communications both internal and external, and everyone is able to respond to clients more efficiently. oncore IT have a very proactive relationship with us and are very quick to react to any queries we have. They also arrange to meet with us on a regular basis, ensuring we have the latest technology to maximise the efficiency of our systems."

Emprise has a forecasted turnover of £65 million for 2007, up from £59 million in 2006, with employee numbers increasing from 4,700 in 2006 to 5,200 for 2007.

David Ebsworth adds: "The new infrastructure and multisite data backup platform allows for virtually limitless growth capacity, so that Emprise's new IT system can handle whatever growth the company experiences in the future."

About oncore IT

oncore IT provides a 24/7, 365 days a year managed IT service for small and medium sized businesses, incorporating both hardware and software for a complete outsourced IT solution. oncore IT partners with best of breed vendors to provide an IT management service that only a large corporate would normally have access to. Services include: remote IS management; provision of all hardware equipment and software licenses; disaster recovery; remote (offsite and online) backup and recovery; desktop management and assistance; equipment hosting and replacement; monitoring and alerting; network access services; bandwidth management; firewall provisioning; and email filtering. For more information, please visit the company's website at www.oncore IT.com or call 08450 541122.

Diagram 1

