

The Symphony Group

How a business on the move revolutionised its desktop estate

Company Overview

The Symphony Group is the UK's largest privately owned manufacturer of fitted kitchen, bedroom and bathroom furniture, with an annual turnover in the region of £150 million per year. Listed in the Sunday Times PWC Profit Track 100, it is one of Britain's top performing private companies, supplying a range of quality furniture to private and public sector house builders, high street retailers and builders' merchants in Britain and overseas

Employing more than 800 staff across its two main sites in Barnsley and Rotherham, Symphony is one of the Yorkshire region's major employers and has grown steadily over its 40 year history. Its reputation for design and innovation is supported by a resolute commitment to exceptional levels of service for customers.

The company has invested significantly in process and performance enhancing technologies, to very good effect. Its forward looking IT strategy is also credited with providing many of the improvements in manufacture and logistics it has been able to pass on to customers in the shape of better products and service.

The Business Challenge

Responding to the company's steady growth and diversification, in 2006 Symphony embarked on a journey which would culminate in its relocation from its long-time manufacturing base in Leeds. The destination, a purpose built head office and production facility set on an 80 acre site, close to Barnsley.

A project of this scale, not surprisingly, underwent three years of careful planning. During this time the IT operations team, who would play a significant role preparing for the move, had the unique opportunity to carefully scrutinise practically every aspect of their existing business systems. Desktop PCs, network infrastructure, telephony, remote access and disaster recovery would all be considered.

"Before and during this project, we worked very closely with UKN. The way they approach, plan and deliver a project has been very pleasing to us at Symphony and sets other companies we work with a good example."

Ruth Rew, Symphony Group's Head of IT

BUSINESS BENEFITS

- Desktop Infrastructure Costs Reduced
- Improved Flexible Working
- Centralised and Simplified Support
- More Security and Better Data Protection
- Straight forward provision for home workers

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Desktop Infrastructure

The desktop estate itself consisted of 400 desktop PCs for office staff and an additional number of thin clients managing various manufacturing processes. With a rolling refresh program, a significant enough proportion of the desktops were nearing end-of-life, allowing Symphony to consider revising its entire approach. The Symphony team knew they had an opportunity to rewrite their IT strategy and were keen to adopt technologies that would meet business requirements and help the company maintain its competitive edge.

In addition, the Symphony Board had decided to offer a number of its employees the option to work from home because of the move. Maintaining a base of PCs for these users would have been very resource intensive and the IT department forecasted any subsequent demand would require extra staff. The information governance guidelines also provided a further challenge, with strict restrictions on data being held or taken outside the company without prior authorisation.

A New Approach to the Desktop

Symphony enlisted the expertise of systems specialist UKN Group to implement a desktop virtualisation solution based on the Sun Ray 'zero client' from Sun Microsystems. The team had been very impressed by the potential cost savings and recognised the benefits of the systems architecture in meeting their requirement for secure remote access and improved disaster recovery.

A zero client device has no locally installed operating system or built-in processing and storage, making it a highly lightweight and efficient choice of desktop. The approach would see virtualised applications presented into a session-based Windows desktop, completely centralised and hosted from the Symphony data centre.

A Sun Ray device would also be given to those users who chose the option to work from home. By providing them with a preconfigured VPN router and a client device, home workers gained secure access into the main data centre without ever having to download any data to a local machine.

For those with occasional home or remote access requirements, the solution also included a fully integrated, secure web portal into the same desktop infrastructure used throughout the company.

In all, 300 new terminals were deployed around the company to a range of user groups. Making use of a built in card reader, multi-purpose smartcards were issued to all staff - combining building access with device and IP telephony login credentials. Hot-swap session mobility now allowed users to move between any location with a supported device (including those at home) and instantly reinstate an active desktop by inserting their card.

Implications of the Project

Symphony has been able to make a wholesale change to the experience and flexibility offered by the previous PC system. Not only that, total cost of the desktop estate is forecasted to go down by 50% over 8 years, inclusive of a server refresh and ongoing support.

“We have Sun Rays in most areas of the business now and our user feedback has been very positive. If you walk into our factory every workbench has at least one Sunray and most have barcode scanners attached. In the offices they are used in credit control, sales, accounts and the meeting rooms for everything from managing customer orders to loading data into saws and drills,” said Symphony’s Head of IT, Ruth Rew.

Security and data management have also been improved, with no information resident on desktop devices and no way of extracting it through the use of USB memory or writable CD.

In the instance of device failure, it is a simple matter of plugging in a replacement for a user to be up and running again, exactly where they left off. With a centralised desktop and application build, the entire user experience is managed without ever having to visit individual machines. This is a huge benefit for IT and the home workers, who can be supported as quickly and effectively as their office based colleagues. Looking ahead, the company plan to move up to 40% of its existing laptop users across to the new solution, which will benefit those employees who require a pure work from home rather than a mobile solution

Energy and carbon saving is also important to Symphony, which takes its environmental commitments very seriously. Not only does the virtual desktop solution consume much less power than the equivalent number of desktops, there is a significant reduction in non-essential travel to and from work by employees taking advantage of the home working initiative.

By mirroring a number of critical servers across to a second data centre in Warwick, Symphony has everything required to stay up and running should the main data centre at Barnsley experience an outage. There is also a 30 seat offsite DR provision, where users could rapidly resume work via the web access portal, reducing the time it takes to restore business operations.

Working with UKN Group

Ruth stated how impressed her team have been with the UKN engagement, “before and during this project, we worked very closely with UKN. They have been part of the wider Barnsley move project and one thing that impressed us from the start has been their professionalism. The way they approach, plan and deliver a project has been very pleasing to us at Symphony and sets other companies we work working with a good example,” she said.

The changes brought about as part of the relocation have enabled Symphony to operate more efficiently and securely as a business, as well as furthering improvements that are of benefit its customers.

Commitment to Quality

UKN recognises the link between investment in our people and the benefits this provides to our clients through the delivery of consistently high standards and quality in line with industry best practice.

