

CASE STUDY

A 'Best of Breed' IT solution puts the Rural Payments Agency at the forefront of Green technology.



Client: Rural Payments Agency
Sector: Government Agency
Product: Service Desk & Professional Services

The Client

The RPA is responsible for delivering over £2 billion of payments to farmers and traders each year under schemes including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Because thousands of people are dependent on these funds, the organisation has a serious responsibility to ensure they are made on time.

"This initiative in particular had a good deal going for it including meeting challenging environmental change targets, and proving the expected reductions in total cost of ownership of IS."

Chris Chant, Chief Information Officer, DEFRA

The Challenge

Doing things differently is not the traditional way of thinking within many government organisations, however the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) decided to do just that as they embarked on a critical project which would revolutionise their approach to desktop computing.

With nearly 6,000 staff administering the scheme, desktop infrastructure is one of the most fundamental components for successful operations. So, as the existing

estate neared end-of-life, the need to find a leading-edge replacement was top of the agenda.

The single most important requirement for this migration was a seamless process, without any impact to the daily operations of the RPA. However, with internal systems presenting a considerable level of complexity, the importance of a swift and successful delivery could not be stressed enough.

Additionally, the situation called for a substantial reduction in the total cost of ownership of Information Services (IS) and had to be aligned with Government targets for lower carbon emissions.

The Solution

The RPA solution is a classic example of how computing can be delivered as a utility, with service availability the sole responsibility of the provider.

After a detailed investigation into the possible options, a decision was taken to switch from traditional PCs over to Ultra-Thin Client (UTC) desktop devices. The scope of the requirements was then extended to provision a fully managed desktop estate, with fixed monthly costs per device. Furthermore, it had to be a scalable solution,



which if successful, could be adopted by any central government organisation.

Following full Catalyst procurement, the contract to implement the change and subsequently provide the managed service was awarded to UKN Group with backing from our strategic partners.

"By demonstrating their unique expertise with UTC technology and having delivered similar solutions elsewhere, UKN Group distinguished themselves as the only partner with the necessary experience for the project, the largest of its kind in the UK" Commented RPA.

Transitioning commenced with an extended pilot scheme - rolling out UTC devices for 50 users in order to test the remote application delivery, establish server requirement and measure the human responses to their new terminals. After overwhelming success and positive feedback from the first stage, the number of users was scaled up to 300; yet again the results were extremely favourable.

The resulting model for deployment would enable 98 percent of the 6,000 users to switch over to UTC terminals, up from an initial projection of only 75 percent total coverage. Successful packaging of the RPA's wide variety of critical applications was achieved using the latest in software and hardware virtualisation techniques. This specialised process was an essential component of the solution which allowed the rapid incorporation of the complex, existing estate.

The entire desktop infrastructure is now being supported under an innovative seven year agreement that guarantees the RPA's service. Senior civil servants have voiced agreement that compared to spending elsewhere in the public sector, the terms of this leading-edge

contract are highly competitive and will be hugely beneficial for the organisation.

The Results

The RPA is undergoing one of the most significant technical roll-outs ever embarked on in the public sector. It will bring about a 260 tonne carbon reduction through environmentally friendly design and will see further significant cuts in the cost of delivering computing across the organisation.

The resulting savings will account for a 45 per cent drop in total cost of ownership during the course of the seven-year agreement, with electricity costs alone, estimated to be down by over £225,000 per annum.

By centralising the way in which all applications and data are accessed, the need for one-to-one desktop administration is virtually eliminated as all maintenance, upgrades and assistance can now be handled centrally. Users are able to log in at any terminal and installation has been greatly simplified with units 'plug and play' ready straight from the box.

The solution has reduced the potential roll out time of an application from 2 to 3 months to 2 to 3 days, leaving resource available to move onto other critical issues and allowing changes to be introduced far quicker. Because of the way software licenses are monitored and managed, there has been an improvement in the time associated with administering the entire software estate.

The Ultra-Thin client project is an important strategy that will speed up many aspects of day-to-day support and administration of the 6000 strong user base. The managed service contract itself is a significant achievement for the RPA, having taken the bold step to implement a leading-edge solution and embrace the



concept of computing as a utility. In reality they have transferred a large portion of the risks associated with managing an important part of the infrastructure and are free to focus on providing their essential services to the rural community.

The Partnership

The successful execution of this major project has been dependent on tight integration and close collaboration between the RPA and UKN Group at all levels. The management team was drawn from both sides and functioned as a single cohesive unit.

By gaining a deep understanding of the RPA's systems and processes it was possible to deliver this project on

time and within budget. With the migration to UTC due to take place successively at all six of the RPA's main sites, the team drew up a strategy which involved all the local site heads and a detailed chain of accountability. An interactive portal was also set up to allow project leaders, technical staff and service delivery managers to access a central pool of information.

Continuing this close working relationship is to be a fundamental part of the UKN Group strategy for ensuring the achievements made to date are the first stage in an ongoing process.

