![Fordway logo] **Fordway**
IT Services. Excellence delivered.

CASE STUDY:

Hosting desktops and a critical regulatory portal for the Oil and Gas Authority

With the online portal which handles the majority of its consent and regulatory activities becoming increasingly unresponsive, the Oil and Gas Authority needed a new secure hosting environment. After a competitive tender it chose managed cloud provider Fordway, which now hosts the portal and provides back-up and DR using its own equipment in two UK data centres. Fordway also set up and hosts a remote desktop environment to run business-critical applications which could not be supported internally and enables new applications to be added rapidly to meet user demands.

The organisation and how it works

The Oil and Gas Authority (OGA) regulates, influences and promotes the UK oil and gas industry to maximise the economic recovery of the UK's oil and gas resources. Much of its work, from drilling applications and licencing to decommissioning notices, is handled via a cloud-based portal. In this highly regulated industry, activities typically need a large number of consents, and centralised electronic transactions are much faster and more efficient. The electronic documents are legally binding and substantiated by digital certificates admissible in a court of law.

Operators use the portal to report monthly production data, apply for dispensations and permits, report oil and chemical spills and to access to BEIS's (the Department for Business, Energy and Insdustrial Strategy) new environmental permitting system PETS. It also provides services to other areas of BEIS, such as planning for electricity pylons.

The business need

The portal was initially hosted through the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC, subsequently incorporated into BEIS). However, the OGA soon realised that it needed a different hosting environment.

"Response times were too slow, and the servers were reaching end of life, so they needed to be replaced," explained Colin Brown, IT Services Manager at the OGA. "The portal is a critical link for the industry, so it was vital to find a solution quickly."

The OGA ran a procurement on the G-Cloud framework in conjunction with DECC. DECC shortlisted two companies, HP and managed cloud provider Fordway, and after in-depth discussions with both organisations the OGA awarded the contract to Fordway.

"We knew that successful IT comes down to the individuals involved," said Colin. "If you have the right people working on a project, it increases the probability of success and reduces risk. We needed a supplier with both the technical expertise and which could provide a dedicated team so we'd have continuity and know who to contact when any problems arose.

> "It became evident that, while both companies could have run the project, Fordway would provide the responsiveness we needed. Key people were there at every meeting and they had a focused approach to problem solving which we liked. Being smaller, they were more flexible and so could adapt to meet our needs."
>
> Colin Brown, IT Service Manager
> Oil and Gas Authority

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1

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The Solution

With the contract awarded, the first step was to size the new cloud hosting environment and design the interconnectivity. Fordway worked closely with Fivium, the company which designed and provides technical support for the portal.

"The type of transactions we handle are at the opposite end of the scale from applications such as online banking," explained Colin. "Instead of being high volume, low complexity, there are fewer but they're highly complex. For example, a permit application could be 50-60 pages long."

The portal has several thousand regular users across the oil and gas sector and within the OGA and BEIS. This adds complexity, as the portal has to be both external and PSN facing. The total build took six months and included a large amount of penetration testing to ensure security could be maintained.

The migration was handled in three stages, with an initial test to identify any potential problems and ensure that exports would be transported safely, followed by a rehearsal two weeks beforehand. As a result of all this preparation the actual migration went very smoothly.

In addition to the portal, Fordway hosts the OGA website and an application on behalf of the marine management organisation. They also provide operating system patching, resilient servers and a comprehensive back-up and disaster recovery service, using their own equipment in two UK data centres.

Another challenge the OGA faced was how to provide its users with applications which could not be supported by its existing internal IT

system. To address this Fordway provides a remote desktop environment which hosts a range of applications, including economic modelling applications, spatial mapping, well modelling and geology software. It also supports a new finance and HR system which is critical to the smooth running of the OGA.

The Benefits

The Fordway hosted portal and remote desktop environment are running smoothly, ensuring that transactions are handled quickly and efficiently. One of the key benefits has been the ability to handle the OGA's changing requirements.

"Our users are very demanding – for example, one of them suddenly informed us that they needed to run a new economic modelling package and it had to be available in less than three months, With our previous corporate IT solution this simply wouldn't have been possible, as the change process would have taken up to six months. Using Fordway's remote desktop hosting, however, we had no problem getting it up and running within the required timescale."

Colin Brown, IT Service Manager, Oil and Gas Authority

Colin is also delighted with Fordway's technical skills and responsiveness. "Ours is an unusual environment as it combines PSN and external users, but they've had no problem in

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2

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providing and maintaining the security we need. They've also provided the continuity of staff which we'd hoped for and been very easy to work with."

The one challenge Colin has faced has been the procurement process, as contracts through the G-Cloud framework are limited to two years. "When it takes six months to build a solution and a further two months to add enhancements, you don't have long to actually run the system before you have to re-tender," he explains. "However, we have managed to work with this, and have just completed a second procurement with the result that the portal will continue to be hosted by Fordway for the next two years. On the whole we've been very pleased with how it's worked."

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3