Microsoft Azure solution keeps leading Watch manufacturer ticking over efficiently

Peers Hardy Group

Leading watch distributor, Peers Hardy, was facing the same challenges as many small businesses – how to maximise the opportunity for international growth whilst struggling with out-dated IT systems that stifled the company's agility. Moving email into the cloud marked the start of an exciting journey for this pioneering business. Now equipped with Office 365, Microsoft Azure back-up and site recovery plus Windows 10, Lumia Phones and Surface Pro 3 tablets, Peers Hardy have become a highly efficient, globally connected team. Data back-up and systems management worries are a thing of the past and with sophisticated disaster recovery capability they are fully protected and ready to face the unexpected.

If you haven't heard of Peers Hardy, you will have undoubtedly seen or purchased one of their products. As the UK's premier supplier of "own label" watches to many top high street fashion chains, they have a vast portfolio including brands such as Pocket, Daniel Wellington, Radley, Kahuna, Orla Kiely and Henry London, which they manufacture, distribute and sell direct.

With a growing team of 110 people, Peers Hardy has been a leading player in the market since the 1970's. Although it's always enjoyed steady growth, when the company expanded it's 2 UK offices to add a manufacturing site in China and a 3rd office in Hong Kong, its growth accelerated overnight. With further plans to actively sell into the US, IT Manager, Mark Griffiths has been revolutionising the company's IT to give the business the flexibility and agility it needs, as well as safeguarding its systems.

Challenge – Mounting data management costs and complexity

Peers Hardy's IT environment looked like many others. Multiple servers were managed onsite with data back-up managed through disks and tapes. As the company's data grew and the size of design files started to exceed 300MB each, just managing those back-ups was getting more and more complex and time consuming. For Mark's team, disaster recovery testing was almost impossible to execute and they feared that should data ever need to be restored, they were facing a good degree of risk. Plus, with offices on the other side of the world, connectivity was challenging and the team was struggling with very small back-up windows.

As server management and upgrade costs continued to grow, the IT team was forced to become more and more reactionary, unable to evaluate emerging technologies which would support future innovation. The catalyst came when their email server needed replacing. Mark looked at other options and decided to move the email service into the cloud. Delighted by the capacity and cost advantages, he began to look at how the cloud could solve other challenges like data storage, back-up and disaster recovery.

"It's fair to say I was anti-cloud but when I saw what we could gain from moving email into the cloud, I couldn't deny the benefit. Customers often ask us to access files from years ago and storage was becoming an issue. That's the point at which our IT strategy turned a real corner," Mark recalls.

### Solution – Greater efficiency and security in the cloud

Microsoft partner and Azure specialist, ACUTEC, worked in partnership with Mark to explore current challenges and future requirements, subsequently designing an integrated cloud solution that would transform Peers Hardy's capabilities and provide a toolset to grow with the business well in to the future. Recognising the escalating challenges around data management, back-up and disaster recovery ACUTEC recommended Microsoft Azure as the core server platform, to reduce risk and burden on internal systems and to embrace the benefit of the cloud.

> "Microsoft Azure has turned our business around – we've shifted from being reactionary to planning ahead. We have greater confidence in disaster recovery and we're saving significant time and cost. ACUTEC's knowledge and close relationship with Microsoft have been pivotal in getting our IT infrastructure to where it is now."
>
> Mark Griffiths
> IT Manager
> Peers Hardy UK

For more information, visit:
www.peershardy.co.uk
www.acutec.co.uk
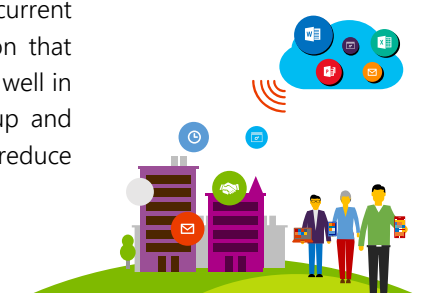
To complement Azure, ACUTEC implemented cloud-based Office 365 for Microsoft Office, Skype for Business and OneDrive for Business, as well as using Windows 10, Surface Pro 3 tablets and Lumia Smartphones.

Accessible across all devices, Office 365 provides everyone with their favourite daily productivity applications for wherever they are working, on up to 5 devices of their choice. Skype for Business provides immense value inside and outside the business for instant messaging, audio and video conferencing, cutting costs and alleviating email volumes. Documents and files are safe and secure in the cloud in OneDrive for Business and fully backed-up in Microsoft Azure.

Azure Site Recovery service provides Peers Hardy with a complete disaster recovery plan ensuring that should internal systems go down for any reason, the whole infrastructure can be back up and running in 15 minutes or less. Using policies set and controlled by Mark, data from Peers Hardy's physical services in the UK and Hong Kong, as well as cloud-based virtual servers is replicated in an ongoing rhythm to provide the business with ultimate protection and business continuity reassurance.

ACUTEC continue to support Peers Hardy with ongoing systems strategy guidance and consultancy, providing a first port of call for ideation, systems development and licensing requirements across the entire portfolio of Microsoft products.

Mark comments, *"Once we'd experienced Exchange Online, and the significant benefits it gave us, tackling back-up and file storage was the next logical step. Moving onto Azure for site recovery has taken away the need for tape backup which not only brings real peace of mind, it's also given us significant cost advantages. ACUTEC's involvement in scoping this solution and moving us onto Azure has been everything to do with the overall success we are now experiencing."*

Benefits & Value

Saving cost and time

- Customised and automated back-up policies in Microsoft Azure are saving significant IT management time with complete reassurance that large quantities of backed-up data can be accessed through the Azure portal at any time
- Data recovery to a physical server can now be completed in a number of clicks, taking minutes rather than hours and saving vital time for more proactive tasks
- Peers Hardy are saving additional money through not needing to purchase and maintain spare test and recovery servers
- With cloud back-up and site recovery capability from Microsoft, Peers Hardy have been able to significantly reduce business insurance premiums based on its ability to recover data fast
- Skype for Business has replaced telephony as the primary means of communication reducing operational cost and providing the team with multiple ways to communicate more quickly
- Azure and Office 365's flexible subscription model ensures that Peers Hardy only ever pay for the exact services they need and consume, reducing both capital and operational expense

Secure disaster recovery

- With Azure Site Recovery, Peers Hardy has complete confidence that should the unforeseen happen, whole sites can be recovered from the cloud within 15 minutes with data that is no more than 4 minutes out of date
- Sophisticated disaster recovery testing can now be executed easily and frequently, without impacting 'business as usual', ensuring that all scenarios are tested to give the business ultimate protection from the unexpected
- By moving to Azure, back-up security fears have been dispelled with all data replicated to the cloud being fully encrypted for ultimate protection

"Our security and continuity is better than we could have imagined. We ship goods daily but if we'd have lost a site before, it would have taken days to recover. I now can recover sites from Azure in 15 minutes or less."

"When our business insurer heard we had moved our server infrastructure onto Microsoft Azure, they reduced our premium instantly by £900. That was a very unexpected benefit of moving to the cloud!

"ACUTEC have delivered above and beyond expectations. I couldn't have embarked on this journey without them. They worked hand-in-hand with the team at every step, effectively training us along the way. "
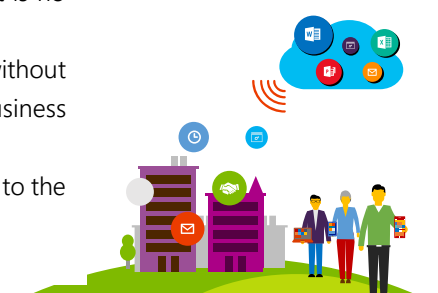
- Ongoing Health Monitoring capability within Azure Site Recovery ensures that the state of replicated data is continuously assessed and alerts are provided to Peers Hardy before the business is impacted
- Through Azure, Office 365 and Windows 10, Peers Hardy enjoy a greater level of cloud-to-device security than previously, at no extra cost to the business
- Faced with growing data volumes and increasingly large file sizes, Peers Hardy have simplified data storage management and enabled on-premise servers to operate more efficiently

Globally efficient and productive

- Through online management portals for Office 365 and Azure, systems management has been dramatically simplified and streamlined meaning common tasks like adding new users and systems testing can be completed from any location at any time
- Company Directors who travel frequently now take their complete office with them equipped with lightweight Lumia Phones and Surface Pro 3 tablets and cloud-based access to all their documents and systems.
- OneDrive for Business provides a highly secure, accessible access point for documents and files so the UK, Hong Kong and China offices can freely share information and work collaboratively together
- Skype for Business has brought the global business closer together enabling the team to connect easily, sharing files through 'drag and drop' and sharing desktops for demos and presentations
- Familiar tools through Office 365 help employees new and old to be operational at all times wherever they are working
- Cross-platform applications within Office 365 have enabled Peers Hardy to implement a BYOD strategy to empower its users to work on devices of their own choice with no compromise to app functionality and capability
- Windows 10 offers the team faster boot times and quick access to important information through the Smart menu tiles and file explorer, helping them get more value out of their day

Proactive planning for growth

- With ongoing business growth front of mind, Peers Hardy are now on a 5-year journey to move all of their server infrastructure to the cloud for even greater efficiency and scalability.
- Supported by the Microsoft cloud, Peers Hardy are fully equipped to manage future growth by being able to quickly create new servers and add new users at the speed of demand, always paying just for the service capacity they need
- Empowered and enabled, the business has changed from being reactionary to thinking and planning ahead, exploring emerging technologies can support further growth and innovation

Mark's Favourite Features

"I love the Azure management portal and how easy it is to find information, retrieve back-ups and test servers – everything is in one place which I can access anytime, from any machine…

…It's so easy to share information in Skype for Business. I had a call from the Hong Kong office the other day with a server query. Rather than try and explain, they simply took a picture dropped it into Skype and I could instantly diagnose the problem. Marvellous!…

…Disaster recovery testing in Azure is as simple as a click of a button, I can set it running anytime with no impact on 'business as usual' activities, that gives me real peace of mind!"

"Azure just gives me real peace of mind. Every day I used to log onto the servers to check the back-up media. Now I don't have to – it runs automatically, I forget about it and know it does exactly what I need it to do."

"The ACUTEC engineers were amazing, designing a very relevant solution, writing custom code in PowerShell to meet specific needs and involving Microsoft to ensure we got maximum benefit from the technology."