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P&O Ferries

Simplifying an upgrade programme from Windows XP to Windows 8.1 – for over 1200 devices across 25 UK locations

P&O Ferries is the UK's largest ferry operator, with a fleet of more than 20 ships carrying some nine million tourist passengers and two million freight vehicles per year on routes across the English Channel, Irish Sea and North Sea to link the UK with France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Ireland.

The challenge

P&O Ferries were aware of the end of life support for Windows XP and set about planning a programme to upgrade their company devices to Windows 8.1. With over 1,200 devices spread across 25 UK locations they'd decided to utilise Microsoft technologies to simplify the way they managed the delivery of desktop and application services, both to their office teams and to remote, fleet based users.

The Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager (SCCM) with Bitlocker Drive Encryption was identified as the solution that would provide this. P&O also wanted to take advantage of their existing Microsoft product licence entitlement to help reduce both the cost of SCCM licensing and the consultancy and professional services resources required to underpin the project.

The deployment of an SCCM solution requires a great deal of knowledge and skill – explains P&O Ferries' Support Analyst Dave Allcock: "Trying to deploy an SCCM solution internally would have been too risky.

It's not something we work on every day, and we knew that if we made any errors during the configuration stage – we'd literally have to start the whole process again. Two weeks work could easily be wiped out in an instant. We felt that the planning, deployment and configuration needed to be done by experts."

When Gold Partner expertise really counts

IT Services' Gold Partner status and enhanced relationship with Microsoft, along with our track record of successful deployments in similar projects provided the assurance P&O Ferries were looking for. They asked us to design, configure and deploy an SCCM solution – the project was delivered in two phases:

Phase one commenced with a design and planning workshop where we mapped the requirements of P&O Ferries to the technical solutions available from Microsoft System Center. Then following the workshop, we provided a solution design and plan ready to be implemented.

> " When we've needed to follow up anything or ask a question by phone or email, the IT Services engineers have been quick to respond with advice and help.
>
> Karl Zimmer,
> P&O Ferries Enterprise Architect

Phase two was the implementation of the plan. During this phase, we fully deployed and configured the solution, and in the process, transferred knowledge to the internal P&O Ferries IT team.

Solution benefits

With the solution now in place, P&O Ferries are realising the anticipated benefits of SCCM and are working through the project to upgrade their users.

Says Karl Zimmer, Enterprise Architect at P&O: "As we progress the project we'll be able to maintain much better records to help us manage our licensing requirements. We're gathering a running inventory of devices, software and applications in use at any time, and this will help us to quickly and easily spot if we need to update any software licences across the business, or if we have existing unused licences that can be used.

Our software is starting to be administered from a single platform using remote consoles that enable us to manage multiple requests for products and applications from one place, and if somebody requires an application loaded as part of their role, it gets done centrally – and we know about it and automatically record it.

The system will also enable us to spot any corrupt files or applications across our desktop estate and rectify the problem without the user being aware that they had a problem in the first place."

Knowledge development and the future

Having IT Services people on site for over two weeks enabled a transfer of knowledge to take place from IT Services engineers to the P&O IT team. Says Dave Allcock: "They showed us a hell of a lot during their time with us – and as a result, our knowledge and skill set has increased considerably."

The contract also covered on-going advice and support - so that although the engineers aren't on site, there's a route through to them for further help as part of the solution. Continues Allcock: "Sometimes it's just a call to clarify and confirm that we're going down the right route – a health check with an expert who's already been working with us."

Going forward P&O Ferries are looking to introduce more active monitoring, automation and orchestration services, so that they'll be able to improve productivity and IT service delivery response times - such as minimising the need to physically travel to remote locations to provide desktop support.

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> P&O Ferries Support Analyst

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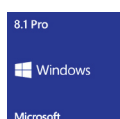
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