



# TSI Partner Case Study: MRF—New Signature



## Technology takes on a deadly disease

Melanoma is serious business: Every hour of every day, an American dies from this deadliest form of skin cancer—equating to about 10,000 lives lost per year in the US alone. But, with the help of technology, Melanoma Research Foundation (MRF) is doing something about it.

“As a nonprofit organization, we support medical research to find treatment and eventually a cure for melanoma,” explains Ivis Alfaro, operations manager for MRF. “We educate patients and physicians about prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of melanoma. We also act as an advocate for the melanoma community to raise awareness of the disease and the need for a cure.”

To support its day-to-day operations, as well as the host of fundraising and awareness events—patient symposiums, 5K runs, webinars, galas, and so forth—it promotes, MRF leans heavily on technology. Until recently, however, the nonprofit’s IT was woefully behind the times. Then the organization hooked up with New Signature, a cloud-first, full-service Microsoft solution provider with which Alfaro had experience from a previous job.

## Locking up MRF technical assets

To kick off the engagement, New Signature assigned an expert to assess the overall MRF IT setup. “When we first came in, they were using slow, aging computers based off a local domain server,” recalls Brendan Clowes of New Signature. “Their software was out of date. They were technically on Office 365 but weren’t taking full advantage—just using it for email. They didn’t even have local backups; their IT was in a pretty sorry state.”

Security was a particularly vital concern since, with its former managed-services provider, MRF had experienced three security breaches, one of which brought down the organization’s IT for three days. The situation was not acceptable, and rectifying it was job #1 for New Signature.



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“We got them off that server and, for the time being, moved them onto another server in the cloud,” relates Clowes, “until we can get them onto Azure AD [Active Directory; the Microsoft multi-tenant, cloud-based directory and identity-management service], which is the next step.”

New Signature also moved to replace all of MRF’s old computers, which were running Windows 7 and long out of warranty, with new machines that support Windows Hello biometrics for enhanced endpoint security without a password. They updated MRF’s firewall and are steering the nonprofit toward multi-factor security.

“In any organization,” Clowes notes, “you want to be as secure as you can be. There are a lot of common-sense things you can do that don’t necessarily cost a lot of money. In MRF’s case, these things hadn’t been done.”

### Money matters

Donor funding is the lifeblood of any nonprofit organization; without it, operations quickly grind to a halt. Melanoma Research Foundation leverages a donor database solution called Raiser’s Edge to support and track its donors and their all-important contributions. But this critical database, it turned out, was at risk before New Signature entered the picture.

“We discovered our original IT company wasn’t even backing up our donor database, like we had assumed they were,” Alfaro says. “That data would have been lost in the [cloud] migration, had our New Signature contact not caught that.”

Other upgrades New Signature has implemented add to MRF’s efficiency—which helps the organization stretch its available funding as far as possible.

“We need to be resourceful with our donor funding,” notes Alfaro. “Having equipment that works properly, having this cloud-based setup helps us be more efficient and speeds things up for us. As a nonprofit, you can’t play around with donor funds, so whatever helps provide that efficiency is really good.”



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### Budget predictability

Equally important as stretching donor funds is budget predictability, Clowes points out. New Signature has migrated MRF to Office 365, Skype for Business, and OneDrive for Business on its “TMX agreement,” a pay-as-you-go cloud model that mirrors the Microsoft E3 license to make costs predictable.

“You can cancel if an employee leaves the organization,” he explains. “We reconcile the number of users in your company or nonprofit every month so you’re not continuing to pay for an individual who’s left. You can add and drop people from our services at will, which adds flexibility and helps respect the donors’ money.

“Now, MRF pays for their server like a utility rather than having this massive, unpredictable cost every month.”

### Moving to the forefront of technology

Although the MRF-New Signature engagement was only a few months old, Alfaro found the move from MRF’s former, reactive managed-services provider to the proactive approach of New Signature to be a refreshing experience.

“Now we’re on Office 365, we’re on SharePoint, and our staff has been trained,” she observes. “New Signature has made us more comfortable with being cloud based and saving all our documents to OneDrive, rather than putting them on our desktops. So there have already been a lot of great, positive improvements; New Signature has helped us get to a place where we are now on the forefront of everything that’s going on with technology.”

Looking down the road, Clowes and the New Signature team have more service upgrades in mind.

“We’re doing everyday MSP [managed-services provider] work for MRF,” he says, “so they can call us if there’s a virus, if they need a password reset, or assistance with this or that. We’ve set up Windows Autopilot to simplify device provisioning, and we want to set up Windows OMS [Operations Management Suite], which will give us a single pane of glass with visibility to anticipate potential trouble spots, so we can take preventive action.”

“We really value their proactive approach and attention to detail,” adds Alfaro. “They make great recommendations that have us in a much better place; it really proves why we had to make this move.”

On a personal level, Alfaro and her MRF colleagues enjoy the advantages of a faster, more productive, less frustrating environment in which to carry out their important work. In the broader sense, it’s fair to say that cloud technology is helping further the MRF mission to put melanoma where it belongs: out of business.