

Legal firm moves to the cloud for greater security, productivity and control

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To improve flexibility, scalability and productivity for their network of legal professionals, visionary law firm Howell Jones, engaged AspiraCloud to implement a cutting-edge Microsoft cloud solution. The firm's growth was being restricted by complex networking and ageing software/hardware. Introducing Microsoft Azure, Office 365, OneDrive for Business and Power BI has simplified that infrastructure, delivering significant cost savings, improvements in productivity, and greater levels of control and data protection. Remote access to applications and case management files has increased service quality while rigorously meeting the compliance standards set by the firm's regulatory body.

Howell Jones is an expert law firm established over 35 years ago, specialising in Family and Divorce, Employment, Property, Litigation, Negligence, Personal Injury and Commercial Law. With 100 staff across eight offices in London and the South East of England, Howell Jones is renowned for its progressive attitude, customer service and results. Steady growth through acquisition in recent years has given Howell Jones an enviably broad spectrum of services not to mention a team made up of the brightest talent in the industry. With exciting plans to expand into new niche areas of law, Chris Cato, Operations Director, has been preparing the business to capitalise on these opportunities.

Challenge

Having every detail to hand is an important part of winning cases and delivering a service of the highest quality for the firm's lawyers. Howell Jones faced unnecessary complexity, costly systems management, risk and data security concerns with their current IT infrastructure. Restricted remote access to integral systems meant that their lawyers were unable to access information while away from the office. Although back-ups were in place, they were unable to rigorously test disaster recovery scenarios without disrupting their daily business. Faced with expiring warranties and hardware refreshes, they commissioned an independent IT review which highlighted significant scope for improvement.

"Our biggest concern was data security and the rising cost and complexity of the existing IT environment. Like many law firms, we had reservations about moving our data into a third-party location, but Microsoft demonstrated that it really understood the requirements of our industry and those of the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA). The Microsoft cloud became an unquestionable choice," comments Chris Cato.

"This is robust, compliant, enabling technology. By moving to the cloud, Microsoft has broken the cycle of uncertainty we faced over our IT. We're 100% confident about information security and we have tools to enable the lawyers to achieve more in and out of the office. As a business we can start looking at new services without barriers to growth."

Chris Cato, Operations Director, Howell Jones LLP



Solution

Microsoft partner, AspiraCloud, worked with Howell Jones to create a new solution blueprint in the Microsoft cloud - resigning old on-site hardware, ensuring fast implementation and achieving full integration with the firm's existing case management system. The new cloud environment was designed to deliver greater information security and compliance, improved flexibility and personal productivity, and new tools to enhance internal and external collaboration.

Howell Jones' cutting-edge IT services comprise of a virtual server environment within Microsoft Azure and the Office 365 suite of productivity applications including Microsoft Office for all staff. SharePoint Online houses the company intranet and team document storage while OneDrive for Business enables selected files and documents to be shared with customers and partners outside of the business in secure 'groups'. With PowerBI, the Howell Jones Management Team can create dashboards to quickly see the health status of the company KPIs and sleek, modern Surface Pro4 machines, powered by Windows 10, enable the lawyers to work in any location as seamlessly as they would in the office with access to their files and applications wherever they are.

Cato enthuses, "What we liked about Microsoft Azure and Office 365 was that everyone had the same apps allowing them to do more, more quickly and with more control. We have much greater confidence as a business and now know that if something happened to one of our offices, we'd be back up and running within about 2 hours."

Chris Cato summarises, "We're creating management team dashboards in Power BI and extending it to all users so they can create their own customised KPI views. That immediate insight was something we couldn't have dreamt of before."

Benefits & Value

Greater efficiency & profitability

- With a simplified IT environment, Howell Jones is saving £90,000 on fibre connectivity in the first year alone, while also making substantial savings on IT management and support
- With SharePoint Online, elements of the intranet can be securely shared with 3rd parties, reducing internal resource time spent on administration
- With flexibility to work remotely lawyers can use every second productively, maximising billable hours and boosting profitability
- Microsoft Azure provides an immediate back-up and disaster recovery solution, enabling the firm to test DR scenarios and be confident that if required, entire sites could be recovered within 2 hours
- Howell Jones has moved all legacy applications, including its case management system, onto the Microsoft Azure infrastructure where Microsoft takes care of the hardware and the business can enjoy greater app performance, cost-efficiency and control

Compliance confidence

- In the Cloud, Howell Jones has 100% confidence that data is safe, secure, encrypted, and never retained by Microsoft; enabling it to fully meet SRA regulatory compliance
- Azure Information Protection and the Office 365 Admin App provides ultimate control and visibility ensuring that the management team can retain control of the data at file level wherever it goes, monitor activity, view performance status and monitor statistics
- With accelerated risk control, Howell Jones has been able to renegotiate business insurance terms supported by the strength of Microsoft Azure and the cloud

Business anywhere

- With Office 365 Howell Jones has empowered its lawyers to work remotely from home, court or while travelling - securely accessing email, applications and files from laptops, Surface Pro 4 machines or Lumia phones
- Surface Pro 4 machines provide the flexibility of a tablet with the power of a laptop – perfect for lawyers to take notes in court, record dictations, access case management files and for working between sessions
- Skype for Business helps the firm stay in touch with customers from any location with audio calls, video conferencing and instant messaging available across all devices
- With advanced features like disaster recovery planning and Azure Information Protection, Howell Jones can now extend remote working even further to provide users with ultimate flexibility and uncompromised access and security

Transformation

- Power BI dashboards provide management teams with immediate insight into the performance of the business enabling more informed decisions; while individuals can create customised role-specific dashboards
- The flexibility and scalability of the cloud will enable Howell Jones to continue growing, safe in the knowledge that the platform can flex quickly and cost-effectively to meet future demand.