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Farrer & Co LLP Moves to Azure

SUMMARY

SystemsUp helps Farrer & Co LLP become one of the first law firms in the UK to move its entire IT infrastructure into Azure.

BENEFITS

- ◆ A cloud platform to support future innovation and growth
- ◆ Improved user experience for lawyers, staff and clients
- ◆ Post-implementation monthly reviews and cost management

FARRER & Co

The Challenge

Founded in 1701 Farrer & Co LLP is one of the UK's most historic yet also one of the most innovative legal practices, with an ongoing commitment to innovate and embrace technology to deliver superb client service. The law firm was struggling with an ageing IT infrastructure and communications network and wanted to completely upgrade it to meet the requirements of its clients and lawyers. It looked at three options:

- Replace the existing infrastructure
- Colocation in a third party data centre
- Move to the cloud

The first two options were dismissed because of the huge expense involved in purchasing replacement hardware and the significant day-to-day management requirements involved with colo.



“We were already running some key applications as SaaS and were comfortable with the concept of the cloud,” explains Neil Davison, IT Director for Farrers. “More importantly the business was comfortable with the cloud as well and so in the end it just seemed like a natural progression.”

To the IT team there were a number of benefits that would result from a move to public cloud. “We knew that if architected properly it would vastly improve the user experience, allow us to rapidly deploy new systems, and provide further opportunities to develop the business, as well as presenting us with far fewer risks than if we were running on prem because of the sheer investment in security that the big public cloud providers have made,” Neil Davison explains. “There’s a lot of technology out there that we’re not yet consuming. For instance to build our own AI platform would be ludicrously expensive, yet with a cloud platform we’d be able to trial it all.”

■ The Approach

The team from SystemsUp was brought in to work out the best cloud strategy for Farrers, with Azure being chosen as the most logical route because of the number of Microsoft products already being used in-house.

The design was done in eight stages:

1. Proof of Concept for Azure environment
2. Copying of non-production data to a test environment
3. Network re-design to enable cloud
4. Prove the design to Farrers IT and security teams and transfer skills
5. Build the production environment in one Azure region
6. Build a copy in another Azure region
7. Copy the live data for end-to-end testing of migration plan
8. The migration

Network optimisation was integral at the testing stage where it became clear that some critical applications were not performing as well in the cloud as they did on premise. SystemsUp subsequently brought in Silver Peak’s Unity EdgeConnect SD-WAN solution. The only SD-WAN vendor in the industry to partner with all four leading public cloud platform providers, Silver Peak ensured that critical network traffic was being prioritised within just six weeks, allowing the applications to be fully optimised for performance in the new Azure environment. Secure connectivity into Azure was achieved using ExpressRoute.

Nick Martin, Managing Director of SystemsUp, explains, “All the key parts of the design were done with Farrers’ requirements in mind – that the new environment would be fully cloud, off premise, fully protected and costs carefully managed. The design work was done both in their offices as well as remotely and the testing was exhaustive and involved all levels of their business.”

Andy Beech is Head of IT Systems at Farrers and managed the project on behalf of the firm. “SystemsUp have been fundamental to every aspect – the design work, the delivery, the management of third parties – they’ve architected the whole thing with our internal team.”

A paper version of the migration plan was produced by SystemsUp. Then testing began, with live production data copied into Azure. “We documented all the test processes to make sure that what was running in the cloud was an exact copy of what Farrers was running on premise. This was key to the success of the testing,” says Nick Martin. “Applications can misbehave when they’re moved to the cloud so we did a lot of work around functionality and performance.”

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■ The Solution

The migration to Azure took place over one weekend. The full copy of Farrer's data was moved on the Friday night. On the Saturday morning it was tested by the IT team and by some key stakeholders and the decision was made to go live later that day. "At every single milestone we were ahead of where we needed to be, to the point that we let the team go home early on the Saturday night," Nick Martin continues. "On the Monday morning there was zero impact on the user experience."

"We were all a bit nervous doing the switch over one weekend," says Andy Beech. "SystemsUp were with us all the way bringing the systems online. They coached us and supported us all the way through, and in terms of the migration they pretty much did it all with us just shoulder surfing. It was as seamless as you could ever have hoped for."

Migrating to the cloud can lead to increased complexity and cost for an in-house IT department. SystemsUp carries out ongoing monthly technical health checks of the Azure environment through its Cloud Edge service, making recommendations to the firm around cost savings, performance and security.

Reflecting on the project Andy Beech says, "The input of SystemsUp has been massive. They've been fundamental to every aspect, architecting it with our internal team and understanding us as a business as well as a team to make sure we're getting it right. They've also helped us with the sheer scale of Azure. As a platform it's immense and it's advancing all the time which is a challenge, so their post-live support is invaluable."

■ The Result

With a history spanning three centuries, Farrers have delivered legal services to a diverse range of clients including royal families, Charles Dickens and the British Olympic Association. However the firm has also been at the forefront of a number of technological advances in the legal sector - becoming one of the first practices to implement a cloud-based solution for managing documents and emails and, as a result of this work with

SystemsUp, it's one of the first UK law firms to move its entire infrastructure into Azure.

As well as helping Farrers manage their new cloud environment on an ongoing basis, the team at SystemsUp is now working on the next stage of the law firm's digital transformation - a complete mobilisation of their workforce. "People will assume that we're in Azure and that's it. It's not. It's just the start," says Neil Davison. "We now need to make the best use of the technologies that are available in Azure to deliver commercial advantage through a cloud-focused experience for our business and our clients."

In all the Azure project has taken eighteen months from start to finish. The IT team at Farrers who worked on the project have been exposed to new concepts providing them with renewed motivation. "It's been a very exciting time for all of us," Neil Davison concludes. "In all my time in IT, working with SystemsUp has been the first true partnership I've had with a supplier. They've helped us with a complete technology transformation and given us a platform for great change. We could not have done it without them."

■ About Farrer & Co

Farrer & Co is synonymous with the highest quality legal advice and service. We advise individuals, families, businesses, financial services, educational and not-for-profit organisations on every aspect of the law, wherever the need arises. From our offices in London we work with trusted professionals around the world to deliver a seamless international service. For more information **visit www.farrer.co.uk**

■ About SystemsUp

Part of the iomart Group, SystemsUp provides independent consultancy and project services that deliver real business benefit. Our vendor agnostic approach is central to ensuring that we deliver value and professionalism through our recommendations and solutions. Our extensive skill-set includes: Cloud Strategy, Azure Consultancy, Modern Workplace, Application Optimisation, Security and Technical Post-Project Support.