



Case Study – Zone CEE Ltd

Zone CEE are an SME in the construction industry specialising in commercial refurbishment projects. They initially contacted us early in 2002 as they were experiencing continuing problems with their IT infrastructure. We audited their infrastructure and provided some immediate resolutions to their specific problems and a set of recommendations regarding the infrastructure as a whole.

Audit Findings

The audit uncovered a similar story that we see at a lot of SMEs. Their IT system had started small (1 or 2 machines) and grew organically without any real planning as the company grew. It consisted of 6 PCs of different ages and capabilities connected together with a peer to peer network running a number of different windows operating system editions.

Business data was distributed across various machines with no real backup strategy. The company had also adopted ACT as a business critical application, the database for this being shared across the peer to peer network. Another critical application was SAGE, the data for this residing on a different machine and relying on that user to perform manual backups.

The reliability of the peer to peer network was an serious issue, users frequently being unable to connect to a machine share or shared printer and having to reboot both the local and share machines to resolve the situation.

There was no centralised e-mail policy, there were only a few e-mail addresses hosted externally and only being available to a few of the staff. Likewise there was no central AV policy, and no security policy for the shared data.

Recommendations

Replace Peer to Peer infrastructure with a Server – Workstation one based on Microsoft's Small Business Server 2000 product. This was a multi-server product (file server, e-mail server, print server, web server, etc.), with a price that was unbeatable. (Buying these products separately was many times the cost of the SBS2000 bundle)

The server had a number of critical functions, which included:

- Control who has access to network data through user names.
- Provide one central place to store business information, making it easy for employees to find, access, and share information.
- Share resources and equipment such as Internet access, printers, and fax machines.
- Provide central email and collaboration management available to everyone
- Provide a central automated backup
- Provide remote access for home or tele-working
- Provide a foundation for future business growth. SBS 2000 was expandable to up to 50 clients.
- Provide centralised AV security management through third party product (Symantec)

We also recommended that Zone CEE brought all client machines up to the same function level (Windows XP)

Unique Challenges

Andrew, one of Zone CEE's directors, understood the critical importance of the IT infrastructure to the company and assigned an appropriate budget to it. He indicated that he intended to replace all the client machines at the same time as purchasing the server. He was also keen to order the hardware himself direct from Dell. We therefore worked with Andrew to ensure the specification of the server and clients he ordered was suitable.

Zone CEE could not afford to be down for more than a few hours. Removing the old infrastructure, installing the new one and configuring it on site (1-3 days) was not an option. We therefore had the new hardware delivered to our office where the server and all clients were configured without disruption to Zone CEE. Finally we took a copy of their live data the night before, copying it to the server, before installing the hardware on site the following day. Zone CEE experienced minimal downtime and were all up and running on the new hardware the same day.

ACT data migration. The process of moving this application over to the server also included a version upgrade. The version upgrade introduced some sporadic application performance problems due to a data conversion issue. We liaised directly with the application manufacturer on Zone CEE's behalf to resolve this issue.

Management & Maintenance

As typical with SME's Zone CEE have no in-house dedicated IT staff and little IT knowledge outside what they need to use their systems on a day to day basis. We therefore installed remote management to allow us to perform the day to day management tasks and respond rapidly to any server configuration requests or support issues.

We also perform quarterly maintenance functions on the infrastructure both remotely and via a quarterly site visit. This keeps the server in a health state and allows us to identify any issues before they become problems.

This system, implemented in 2002, is still going strong in 2009, a vindication, we feel, of the infrastructure design and implementation.

"I was extremely happy with the implementation of this project. Setting up the infrastructure off site in a unhurried environment enabled us to give the configuration the care and attention it deserved which allowing us to deliver a product to the highest standard of quality we demand." — Mark Moran Director, 4IT Systems Ltd