Data#3 | Uniting

Uniting Vic.Tas Gains 24/7 Performance with Citrix on Azure Managed Service from Data#3

A Data#3 Customer Story

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ABOUT VIC.TAS

Uniting Vic.Tas is the community services arm of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania. It delivers a broad range of services in the areas of child and family services, mental health, emergency relief, homelessness and housing, financial wellbeing, alcohol and other drugs, disability, early learning and employment. Uniting also provides Lifeline services in Melbourne and Ballarat, community meals programs in Prahran, Ballarat and Hobart and asylum seeker and refugee support services in metropolitan and regional Victoria. It works with people of all ages and all stages of life to empower them to live their best life.

APPROACH

To ensure the best outcome was achieved, Uniting embarked on a competitive tender process. After ranking responses on a range of factors including expertise, value for money, proposal and cultural fit, the team at Uniting determined that Data#3 was best positioned to provide the technical capability and support skills they needed.

OBJECTIVE

Uniting's mission is to provide care and support for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of local communities across Victoria and Tasmania. Facing resiliency issues associated with aging and disparate technology platforms, Uniting wanted to build an environment capable of delivering broad services to their 7000+ workforce of staff and volunteers located across 300 sites, who were working both onsite and remotely. It was imperative that the chosen provider had the 24/7/365 service capabilities to outsource support of Citrix on Microsoft Azure ("Azure"), and the ability to deliver agreed service levels from within Australia.

FUN FACT

By 2023, **50%** of enterprises will utilise a cloud managed service provider to run some portion of their hyperscale cloud deployments, up from less than **20%** in 2018.

Gartner (2018), Public Cloud Infrastructure Operations and Management Is a Shared Responsibility Model [Online] https://blogs.gartner.com/rene-buest/2018/12/14/public-cloud-infrastructure-operations-and-management-is-a-shared-responsibility-model/

COMMENTS

"By introducing the managed services from Data#3, we were able to deliver to critical deadlines at scale and work more efficiently to meet the needs of our users, who can in turn better serve the needs of our clients."

Chris Pivec, Chief Information Officer, Uniting Vic.Tas

BENEFITS

- A centralised and flexible application delivery platform
- Deployed on Microsoft Azure
- Rapid and efficient transition in stages from fat to thin client
- High levels of customer satisfaction
- Rapid, priority-based response times
- 24/7/365 Australia-based support

TECHNOLOGY

- ☑ Managed Services
- ☑ Microsoft Azure
- ☑ Citrix

The Background

Uniting Vic.Tas is the community services arm of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania. It delivers a broad range of services in the areas of child and family services, mental health, emergency relief, homelessness and housing, financial wellbeing, alcohol and other drugs, disability, early learning and employment. Uniting also provides Lifeline services in Melbourne and Ballarat, community meals programs in Prahran, Ballarat and Hobart and asylum seeker and refugee support services in metropolitan and regional Victoria. It works with people of all ages and all stages of life to empower them to live their best life.

Technology plays an increasingly important role in providing Uniting's services, operating at 300 sites, providing a number of services, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A complex network (after a 2017 merger of 24 founding members) and aging technology platforms led to resiliency issues, in turn increasing the demand for support. Uniting recognised that change was needed, to ensure that applications and technology could support their high standards of care into the future.

The Challenge

Throughout the Uniting organisation, every action is taken with service in mind. This is especially felt within the ICT team, where aligning technology means enabling frontline staff to spend less time on administrative tasks and more time giving vulnerable young people access to online learning or saving costs best spent on extra comforts for the elderly.

For Chief Information Officer Chris Pivec, the focus on enabling business outcomes is essential.

"With every decision, we must always consider the impact on our organisation and its ability to deliver services to the community. We see technology as an enabler for our people and those we serve."

"Our staff would undoubtedly prefer to spend their time interacting with the community, and not dealing with administration duties slowed by performance challenges," said Pivec.

As Uniting's services are in demand and the organisation seeks to assist vulnerable groups within the community, Pivec was also conscious of the limitations of the existing platform and the need to control cost.

"Our legacy platforms had a limited scale capability, and it was clear that we needed to transition to an environment that offered us flexibility and room to scale as our needs grow and change. We knew that Windows 10 IOT combined with Citrix would be a game changer for us."

This expansion potential was needed more than ever as Uniting sought to expand its new IT offering into its remote offices and progressively consolidate applications and replace the technology across 300 sites. With this in mind, Pivec initiated a competitive tender process to source an Australian-based partner with significant proof of customer satisfaction levels and the ability to meet Uniting's needs.

IT Outcome

After reviewing Uniting's requirements, Data#3 recommended a Citrix solution deployed in Microsoft Azure ("Azure"). While the Azure platform is managed by Uniting's in-house IT team, they are able to leave the Citrix environment to be managed 24/7/365 by Data#3's highly skilled Managed Services team. This solution requires trust and co-operation, with Data#3's managed services specialists becoming a part of Uniting's extended IT team.

"It has been a great team effort. There are very few partners who can operate at the level of Data#3 and service such a large Azure/Citrix deployment as ours (scaled to 2,000 concurrent users with rollout to serve staff across 300 sites in Victoria and Tasmania)," explained Pivec.

Having this centralised application delivery, deployed securely and efficiently within the public cloud, allows Uniting the flexibility to adapt and rapidly scale to changing needs to best deliver community services. With the solution deployed across two separate Azure regions, Uniting now has confidence that they have a very high level of resilience.

Uniting works in a rapidly changing business landscape, and the Data#3 managed services offering is designed to keep pace. The solution was tailored to work not only with the existing fat client laptop environment, a heterogenic home IT environment, but also with a new fleet of Windows 10 IOT thin clients. The new solution enabled staff to work securely from any location, both on-site and remotely, and worked seamlessly in conjunction with Uniting's new Software Defined Network (SDN).

"We are a dynamic organisation, so we needed to be agile and ready to adjust very quickly as work demands and expectations change. The managed Citrix on Azure solution achieves on that goal," commented Pivec.

"It is easy to administer and allows us to support delivery of new services rapidly."

Reducing the dependency on legacy platforms and handing support for the Citrix environment to Data#3 frees the Uniting team to focus on rolling out new technologies to its 300 sites. Working again with Data#3, Uniting is currently deploying an Internet Kiosk solution so that clients and visitors can access the internet. In many vulnerable groups, internet access cannot be taken for granted, and the kiosks will help clients connect with family, friends, and employment and education opportunities.

"It is well established that social connectedness is a major contributor to wellbeing, especially among the disadvantaged. We know the role of technology is now critical for most adults and kids, and this is even more so during the various lockdowns the country has experienced from March of this year," explained Pivec.

Business Outcome

The ability to quickly adjust was promptly put to the test, with Uniting's IT team experiencing increased work-from-home requests prompted by COVID-19. Something that would have been extremely challenging (an overnight request for 3000+ staff to work from home) when working with a legacy environment was readily accommodated. The ability to align with business needs supported Pivec's pursuit of technology that enables the business.

"In my experience, Data#3 is currently a leader in Victoria in these types of managed services," stated Pivec.

"Their understanding of our organisation has played a key role in aligning technology to our business needs."

By ensuring increased performance, a fast response time for priority incidents, and ITIL maturity for support processes, the Data#3 Managed Services team has been able to help Uniting to achieve a high level of user satisfaction. However, the outcome has been about more than technical expertise.

"Data#3's staff have been highly professional at all times, are motivated to deliver positive outcomes for our staff and clients, and have taken feedback on board to continue to develop the relationship and address any issues," commented Pivec.

Efficiency has also been enabled: where managing legacy infrastructure had become increasingly resource-intensive and had the potential to increase risk, the new Citrix solution running on an Azure platform allows for stability, as well as predictable and easily managed costs. Finding a partner that took the time to understand Uniting was key to developing a cost-effective solution.

"This real partnership – something increasingly rare with major vendors - has been critical to our continued success" outlined Pivec.

Conclusion

In intensely challenging times for the Community Services industry, the need for dependable and agile IT has never been more critical. *"While the need for technical excellence is a given, it is people that count the most,"* said Pivec.

"Data#3 has provided Managed Services support for our Azure-hosted Citrix environment for almost 2 years. They have demonstrated a very high level of professionalism and diligence and have continued to mature their level of technical expertise along with our changing needs."

For Uniting, an important element of the partnership is knowing that Data#3 is located within Australia, with locally-based specialists available to provide support around the clock.

"Data#3 is fully 'on-shored' and offers a range of innovative p1/p2 services, such as a 'tech bridge' for critical issue management, which we value highly. Overlaying this, their CEO, account management teams, and service delivery managers are highly experienced professionals who practice modern 'soft sales' and understand business critical service in an enterprise environment," said Pivec.

Ultimately, the highlight of any technology solution is in knowing that Uniting is equipping itself to continue its dedicated mission to support vulnerable communities into the future.

"By introducing the managed services from Data#3, we were able to deliver to critical deadlines at scale and work more efficiently to meet the needs of our users, who can in turn better serve the needs of our clients," concluded Pivec.

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