



The Representative Body of the Church in Wales Case Study

Server Virtualisation Case Study

Overview

The Representative Body of the Church in Wales is the central administrative body serving all six diocese of the Church in Wales. In addition to its primary role of managing the Church's financial assets, it also provides a myriad of centralised support services to the 200+ Bishops, Archdeacons and lay staff serving the Welsh community, including legal support, HR, financial and IT services. When it was looking to refresh and centralise its IT estate, Phoenix Software was able to build a solution which not only met its immediate needs, but also prepared it for a cutting-edge future.

The Challenge

The Representative Body of the Church in Wales issued a national tender for the consolidation and standardisation of its IT environment in order to deliver its IT services

more efficiently from a central location. The new IT infrastructure would be required to centralise the activities of the six diocese so that site visits and associated regional geographical demands could be reduced. The Request for Proposal (RFP) also included a refresh of all end-of-life equipment, an increase in the server's overall capacity and re-utilisation of existing equipment for backup and disaster recovery.

"Our aim was to deliver on our vision of a standardised WAN environment which could provide each of the diocese with all of the services they needed, while being delivered from a central location which was highly resilient, secure and easy for us to support," commented Leon Hughes, ICT Manager at The Representative Body of the Church in Wales who led the project. →



KEY POINTS

The Challenge

The Church needed to centralise its core IT infrastructure in order to deliver a more consistent service to its 200+ users, while also reducing operational and support costs and future-proofing it for a future VDI deployment.

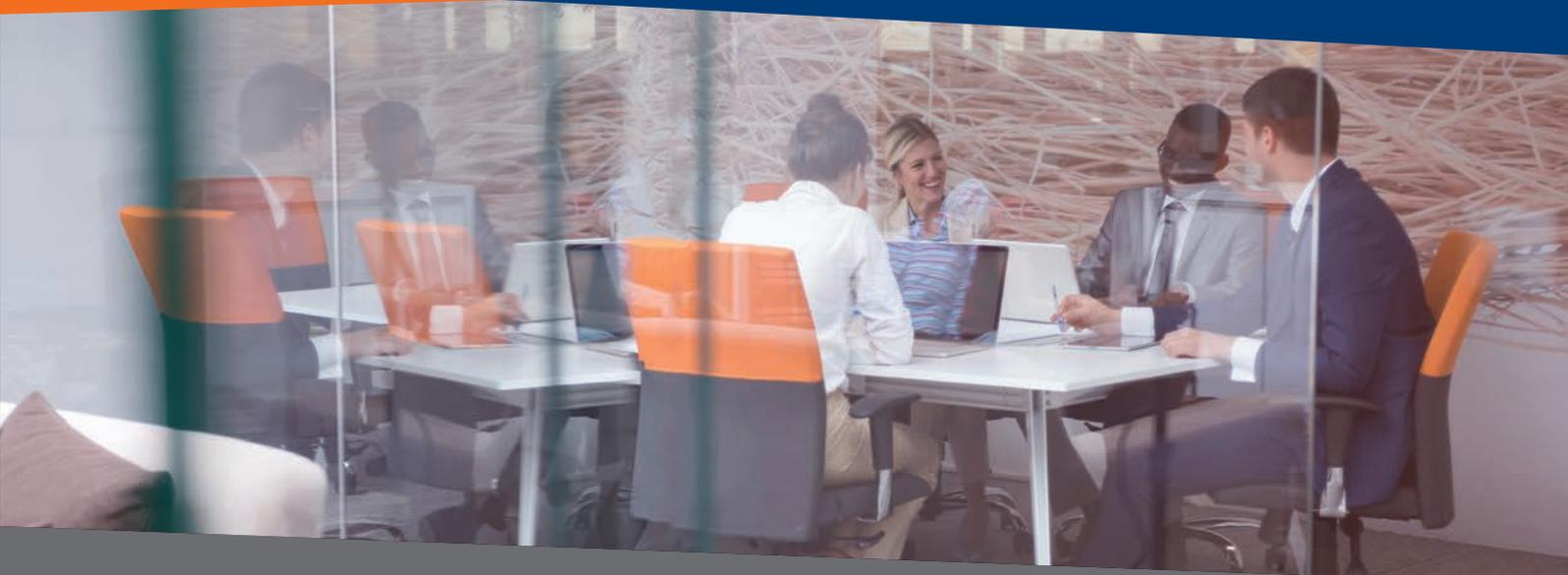
The Solution

Phoenix Software designed and deployed a virtualised server infrastructure coupled with a NexGen SAN array for maximum performance today and in the future. The Church's retired server assets were also re-used to build a cost-effective disaster recovery solution.

The Benefits

Significant improvements in the performance, resilience and total cost of ownership of the Church's IT infrastructure, including £25,000 - £35,000 annual savings in day-to-day operating costs alone. A high-performance VDI service can also be deployed in the future with minimal additional hardware or disruption to users.





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Leon Hughes, ICT Manager, The Representative Body of the Church in Wales

“Many of the assets that we were obligated to support had been deployed locally in response to immediate parish needs. This resulted in a patchwork infrastructure of local and centralised services which meant that not only was our central server becoming increasingly under-utilised, but that crucial data was often not backed up and not readily available by those who needed it in the broader Church. Such a fragmented environment was also very time-consuming to manage because most of the local assets could not be accessed remotely, meaning that a relatively simple SAN issue in a distant Parish would take one of my team out of the office for a full day, with most of that time spent travelling. The situation was simply unsustainable and very inefficient.”

In its response to the tender, Phoenix Software took the time to understand the Church's long-term needs and ambitions in order to design a solution that could adapt to the needs of the future. This approach is embodied in Phoenix Software's 'Future Now: Three years Out' policy and is key to how it operates as a trusted IT advisor to all its customers.

From these various conversations, Phoenix Software understood that the Church could

benefit from upgrading its VPN-based infrastructure to a country-wide desktop virtualisation infrastructure in order to deliver the most consistent experience to its users. While internet connectivity is improving fast, poor connectivity quality in a small number of the more remote parishes requires the Church to place this project on hold in the short term. However, given this longer-term plan, Phoenix Software took account of this future requirement in its proposed server design. The foresight of this design, in addition to the business-led consultancy throughout the process, led to Phoenix winning the bid for the server refresh project.

The Solution

Phoenix Software designed a solution that met both the Church's immediate need to consolidate its IT infrastructure while also easing the future transition to a virtual desktop infrastructure.

For the virtualised server environment, Phoenix Software proposed three Dell R730 servers with 256GB memory and two 8-core processors and four 10GB NICs each. The three servers were virtualised with VMware vSphere Essentials Plus. For disaster recovery purposes, Phoenix

Software re-utilised the Church's existing servers and software licences plus some switches, providing full resilience at minimum cost.

In order to maximise the performance of the virtualised servers but also, more crucially, to deliver the required performance of the more demanding virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) on the Church's roadmap, Phoenix Software proposed a NexGen (formerly Fusion-io/SanDisk) SAN array which delivers the best of both worlds; high levels of storage capacity combined with exceptional IO performance. In contrast to traditional hybrid drives, NexGen's unique approach utilises the much faster PCIe interface for its SSDs, meaning that performance is unconstrained, usable disk capacity is maximised and overall scalability is much more efficient.

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“The implementation was absolutely exemplary. Phoenix Software’s approach gave us massive confidence in the system itself but also that we’d be well supported in the future. The post-sales support has also been superb, with every call responded to in a timely and efficient manner. We have received nothing but the best support from the moment we first made contact with Phoenix.”

Leon Hughes, ICT Manager, The Representative Body of the Church in Wales

The project itself was completed very quickly, with the server upgrade and full data migration being completed within just five days. What’s more, the Church’s 200+ users saw zero downtime or interruption to their services during this time.

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The Benefits

By refreshing its server infrastructure with Phoenix Software, the Representative Body of the Church in Wales has seen improvements in the performance, resilience and total cost of ownership of the IT services it provides to its colleagues across the country.

Significant cost reductions: The Representative Body of the Church in Wales

estimates that the new infrastructure saves the organisation between £25,000 – £35,000 every year in day-to-day operating costs alone. The Church expects to achieve 100% ROI within just three years – three years earlier than expected!

Ease of management: The centralised infrastructure means the IT team can now support its 200+ users from a central location. This has all-but-eliminated the need for onsite visits and enabled IT to focus more of its time on forward-looking projects instead of constantly firefighting or travelling.

Future-proofed: Since Phoenix designed the solution with the Church’s future use of VDI in mind, the Church will be spared any significant expense or disruption when it chooses to implement desktop virtualisation further down the line. In fact, Phoenix Software estimates that VDI would take just five days to implement on the existing hardware.

Top-class performance: By using flash storage as the basis of the virtualised server infrastructure, Phoenix Software is able

to address the latency inherent with disk drives and deliver the best performance possible. This not only benefits users today, but will ensure they receive desktop-class performance from the virtualised desktop environment once it is implemented.

Low-cost disaster recovery: By re-using the Church’s existing server hardware, it now benefits from a complete fail-safe infrastructure for the very first time, meaning that users will experience no loss of service in the event that the primary server ever fails.

NEXT STEPS

For further information on the products and services available from Phoenix Software, contact a member of our team on:

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