Complex hosting requirements?

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The Client: Image Centre

Image Centre is responsible for the online presence of a dozen magazine titles and hundreds of client websites.

The problem: Managing Complexity

Matt Cooney is technical director and explains the challenge the business faced: "With these websites, including everything from online content for publications to ecommerce platforms to server-side support for mobile apps, reliability and performance is a must. However, we were running into issues of complexity that were becoming difficult to manage."

Cooney explains that Image Centre's websites are built using a wide range of technologies on several platforms. "Some use open source technologies like Python and PHP, some are Microsoft-centric, and some are bespoke websites which incorporate a number of different technologies," he says. "Some require custom provisioning on the server, while others are fairly vanilla installs of commodity apps like WordPress."

Not only does this result in complexity, but the sites were also hosted on a combination of common in-house hardware and capacity provided by external service providers. All of that was managed by a 'traditional' IT vendor.

The result, says Cooney, was a somewhat opaque value chain. "With multiple providers, pinpointing issues was difficult and unwieldy. It was difficult to form personal relationships, make direct contact or find individuals willing to take responsibility."
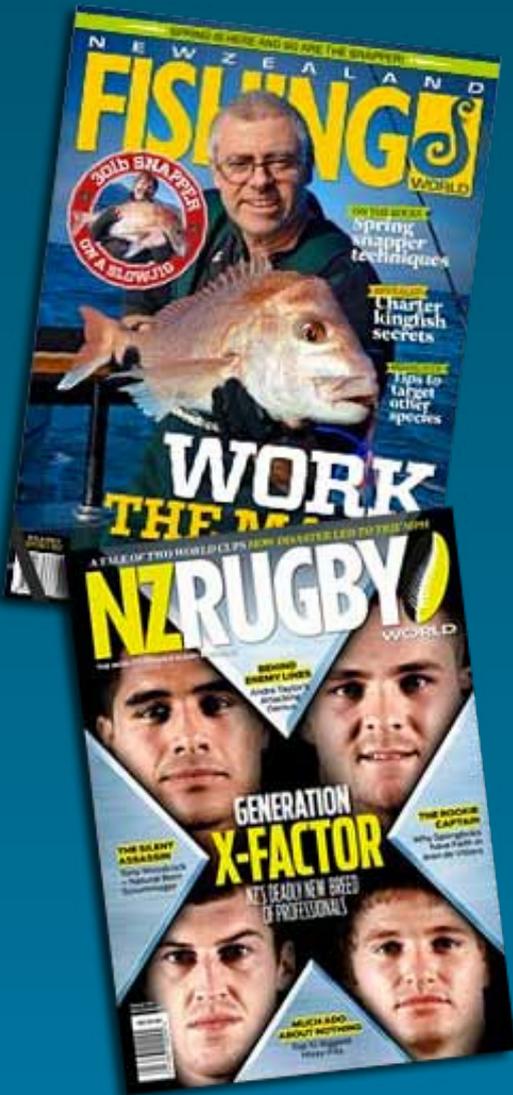
Approach: Find a hosting company that could cope

What does a business do when complexity becomes a headache? The answer is easy: it goes to hosting specialist Web Drive for a trouble-free migration and a substantial improvement in performance.

In seeking a better option, several potential service providers were considered. However, given the scope of the task – and the sensitivity of dealing with the online presences of many businesses – the migration threatened to become more complex than sticking with the status quo. "For example, there were hundreds of databases which would have to be individually reconfigured on a new platform. We needed to implement caching servers, middleware, various app servers, various background daemons and so on. It really was a horribly complex task," Cooney says.

However, as a hosting specialist, Web Drive was up to the challenge; sales director Neil Webster says hosting often starts out simple, but can quickly become complex. "Websites today must be built according to the specific needs of individual businesses.

That's why we don't dictate technology choices to organisations like Image Centre – but we also make sure we can still guarantee non-negotiable characteristics like security, reliability and performance."

Local provider - Pragmatic communication, more responsibility

Cooney says dealing with a single hosting provider has delivered substantial advantages; he makes the point that there is nothing 'touchy-feely' about forging personal relationships with service providers. "We have a complex environment; when dealing with individuals, they build up knowledge of that environment and can therefore quickly understand and address any situations that arise."

With the migration complete, Cooney says examples of Web Drive's pragmatic approach include proactive suggestions for improvements. "In speaking with their technical people, there is a definite sense of comfort, with sound advice on technology direction. In short, we found a supplier which could demonstrably handle everything expected without making it our problem."

Webster says Web Drive is in its element when it comes to unusual and complex hosting requirements. "Our business is making websites perform, whether it is for a bank, an online publication or ecommerce sites. That's what makes us a specialist service provider,"

Result – Get on with your core business and leave the rest to your service partner

Cooney says today Image Centre has a reliable and dependable platform. "Web Drive understands the necessity for cross-platform hosting; that allows us to meet the specific needs of a variety of clients. It also understands redundancy and put in place the necessary architecture to ensure reliability in the event of a disaster, suggesting a third-party offsite system from which we can restore without their assistance."

As a result, Cooney says Image Centre is now in a position where it can focus on new website builds and new technology, and leave the hosting to its partner, Web Drive. "A lot of so-called specialists and experts aren't. However, where Web Drive is concerned, we've benefited from dealing with an organisation which is transparent, flexible and willing to fit in with how we work. Where others couldn't, Web Drive got us up and running with minimal disruption."