Case study
Ashdowne Oil and Chemicals

SENTIS
Managed Solutions

Smooth running IT for Oil and Chemical Distributor

Key benefits

- Hybrid cloud Sage 200 hosting
- New disaster recovery plan
- Four hour fix window
- Remote access to ERP

Ashdowne Oil and Chemicals Limited operate in a very niche industry, supplying wholesale chemicals to oil and lubricant manufacturers and fuel refineries across the UK and Ireland. As the sole UK distributor for US petrochemical giant Afton Chemicals, Ashdowne have captured significant market share since starting up in 2009.

The company's success is due in part to their ability to rapidly fulfil customer orders on time and in full - a strategy that sets Ashdowne apart from the competition. With a complex product range running into hundreds of variations, it is critical for Ashdowne to have the right software to manage a high volume of transactions with the minimum of fuss.

Managing Director, Tony Ball chose Sage 200 ERP as the software platform and because the company has a split base of operations, with sales processing handled in Warrington and support services in Kent, Tony was persuaded that the cloud offered the most appropriate hosting solution.

Cloud hosting also offered real-time access to critical sales figures and stock levels when he and the sales team were on the road – a critical factor in ensuring the company's commitment to quick delivery times can be met.

On paper, the cloud seemed the logical choice, but while the incumbent provider had promised much, the reality was proving less than ideal.

As Tony explains, system performance was woefully inadequate but with no logical reason for the problem. "We're not very intensive users – in fact only a few of our staff use Sage 200 which is integrated with Microsoft Office. Even at that level of usage, it could take up to an hour to process and print a report. I'm by no means an IT expert, but that clearly wasn't right."

For a business that relies on the ability to deal with customer orders quickly, this level of service was unacceptable. Tony continues, "It reached the stage where the system would disconnect and we'd be unable to reconnect without logging a support call. It would then take time to resolve – up to several hours at a time – and for us as a business that simply wasn't good enough."

Looking for a fix to the cloud problems, Tony called in Sentis Managed Solutions to see if there was anything that could be done. After assessing the system and developing an understanding of what Tony and his team wanted to be able to do, it was clear that patching up the cloud hosting was not necessarily the best approach.

Instead, Sentis proposed a hybrid-cloud arrangement that would radically improve performance, provide a disaster recovery option and reduce costs without losing any of the remote access requirements that the original set up should have delivered.

"Stage one in the process was to set up a new on-premise server which is virtualised to protext Sage 200", explains Neil Homer, Director at Sentis Managed Solutions. "We then worked with their Sage Support partner to extract the data out of the cloud environment and migrate it to the local server."

"What that meant was that the software was running as it was designed to do - on a local environment rather than in the cloud. Given that there are so many SaaS options available there's an expectation that everything will work in the cloud, but for traditional software it isn't always possible or economically feasible. This was a case in point."

After the migration was complete and the system went live, Sentis ran some benchmarking tests. Reports that had previously taken up to an hour to produce and print were now taking under a minute. As Tony puts it, "we were suddenly in a different league."

In addition to the new server, Sentis also set up disaster recovery measures including on-site and off- site replication with a four-hour fix window as well as managed on-site back up. Sentis also provide IT helpdesk services, proactive server monitoring, anti-virus, and capacity and performance alerting.

Key client facts

Sole UK distributor for Afton Chemicals

Supplying fuel refineries and oil/lubricant producers in the UK

Operate next day delivery

Multiple UK locations
(Sales, Administration & Distribution)

Established in 2009

The final part of the of the solution was to improve Ashdowne's email and communication capabilities. Their email was migrated onto the Sentis email cloud platform, which was both better value for money and provided more capacity. This, coupled with Skype for Business makes collaboration between the two offices much easier.

For Tony, switching to Sentis means he can get on with the day job of running the business. "What I want from my IT is for everything to work as it should, when we need it to. The guys at Sentis get that and have taken all the worry off my shoulders."

"What I want from my IT is for everything to work as it should, when we need it to. The guys at Sentis get that and have taken all the worry off my shoulders."

About Sentis

At Sentis, we don't believe in 'standard IT'. We do believe that where IT plays a critical role in the operation of your business, then it's vital to make sure IT supports your business strategy.

That's why we work to really understand your business in order to help you get the most from the technology and people available. And because every business is different we understand that what works for one won't necessarily work for another.

Equally we know that most businesses simply want their IT to work, without getting too involved in the finer detail. So, we take the 'tech out of technology' by explaining things in simple terms and getting right to the benefits, without getting hung up on features.

We have a dedicated team of experts in the office and out on the road, offering helpline and on-site support to keep your business moving should your IT let you down. The whole team is totally committed to delivering excellent customer service, without baffling anyone with tech talk.

Our range of technical specialists includes:

- Technical Solutions Specialists
- Implementation Management
- Support Analysts
- Senior Consultants
- Data Centre Specialists
- Project Managers

As an independent company, we are not tied to any hardware or software vendors, so are always able to recommend exactly what is right for you. Our cloud based services are delivered via data centre locations in Leeds, Newbury and London.

Our individual approach, a broad range of technical expertise (in plain English) coupled with excellent customer service and no limitations on the technology we can offer makes Sentis a true partner.