



Client: TaxAssist Direct Ltd
Website: www.taxassist.co.uk
Client size: 25 employees, plus network of over 175 branch offices
Vertical industry: Financial services
Location: United Kingdom

Business profile

Founded in 1996, Norwich-based TaxAssist Direct employs around 25 staff and operates as the central hub, and national support centre to the network of over 175 TaxAssist Accountants offices located throughout the UK. Taken as a whole, the network looks after more than 30,000 clients, making TaxAssist the largest national network of accountants who focus specifically on the small business sector.

Services and solutions

- Managed Service Provision
 - Reactive Support
 - Proactive Maintenance
- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Windows Server 2003
 - Exchange Server 2003
 - SQL Server 2005
- Microsoft Desktop Product Portfolio
 - Windows XP Professional
 - Office 2003 Professional
- Core Hardware
 - HP ProLiant DL380 server
 - Cisco Integrated Service Router
 - Cisco Catalyst switches
 - Cisco Wireless Access Point
- Communications Products
 - Blackberry Professional Software
- Backup and Recovery Products
 - Online Backup Solution



The TaxAssist Accountants network consists of over 175 independent offices servicing more than 30,000 clients.

Hardware refresh makes financial sense for TaxAssist Direct

“We have used Breakwater IT for several years now and have always found them to be customer focussed and technically excellent. They just seem to have a different mindset to other IT companies out there, and we wouldn’t hesitate to recommend them to other businesses looking for an IT partner they can rely on.”

Phil Sullivan, Network Operations & Finance Director, TaxAssist Direct Ltd

Norwich-based TaxAssist Direct Ltd is the support centre for the TaxAssist Accountants UK network, which in less than 15 years has grown to become the largest national network of accountants dedicated to servicing small businesses. Having provided a first-rate outsourced Managed Service Provision to both TaxAssist Direct Ltd and several members of the wider network for a number of years, in 2009 Breakwater IT was selected to spearhead the replacement of the core IT infrastructure located at the support centre.

The problem

TaxAssist Direct had been utilising Microsoft’s Small Business Server product to provide core file sharing and messaging functionality within their business for a number of years. However with the existing server infrastructure no longer supported under a manufacturer’s warranty, and the hardware increasingly unable to meet the demands placed upon it, TaxAssist Direct recognised the impending need to replace this server presented an opportunity to reassess their IT needs and address a number of underlying problems within the existing infrastructure.

The key issues that needed to be addressed were:

- **Network performance:** The deployed network infrastructure had reached the end of its lifespan, and did not provide any management functionality to aid network troubleshooting.
- **Desktop performance:** Ongoing day-to-day usage had resulted in an excess of legacy applications being deployed on client computers, draining system

resources and reducing performance for staff.

- **Physical security:** Piecemeal changes to the existing server and network infrastructure had resulted in hardware being located in a data cabinet in a disorderly and unsecured fashion.

In lieu of these issues, TaxAssist Direct identified the need for guidance to design a revised IT infrastructure which would not only resolve the failings of the existing systems, but meet the future needs of the business whilst being deployed in a manner that would bring minimal disruption to their day-to-day operations.

The solution

Breakwater IT’s technical and business analysts worked closely with key decision makers from TaxAssist Direct to produce a project scoping document, clearly defining the project deliverables; constraints; tolerances; quality expectations and acceptance criteria. This process ensured TaxAssist Direct were provided with both clear visibility of the project aims, and a set of

measurable criteria against which the success of the project could be determined.

Network

Two new Cisco Catalyst Express switches were deployed to provide both high-speed network performance for connected client computers, and a gigabit backbone at the core of the network to eliminate performance bottlenecks. The new devices also provide management capabilities to allow for advanced troubleshooting functionality.

Servers

Breakwater IT elected to replace the existing server with new hardware from HP, incorporating the latest dual quad-core Intel processors to ensure maximum performance. In accordance with the criteria defined within the project scoping document, Breakwater IT seamlessly migrated the existing Microsoft Small Business Server domain and data to the new hardware platform, thus ensuring the process would be transparent to end-users. All line-of-business applications were then re-installed and tested by approved third-parties. Post completion of the migration process, Breakwater cleansed the infrastructure of any orphaned data to ensure the server operated as if it were a clean installation. For the benefit of remote workers, Breakwater IT deployed Blackberry Professional software ensuring that e-mails are delivered seamlessly to compatible mobile handsets.

Desktop infrastructure

Breakwater IT completed a rigorous cleansing exercise of all client computers, in addition to ensuring that both a corporate naming policy was adhered to, and only business-approved applications were deployed to each machine.

Management and security

The environment was secured via the configuration and deployment of a revised Group Policy structure standardising items such as; a secure password policy across all computer and user accounts; corporate imagery and desktop experience across all desktop computers (incl. locking screensavers). Finally, all hardware was secured within a data cabinet, and all network cabling routed neatly between each device.

Backup and recovery

An online backup solution was deployed to the Microsoft Small Business Server, providing TaxAssist Direct with a fully-functional backup and recovery solution without the need to manage cumbersome tapes or other portable media.

The benefits

By use of premium hardware technologies supported under a full manufacturer's warranty, and supplied by industry-leading vendors; quality, performance and scalability targets were all met within the delivered solution.

Thanks to both Breakwater IT's adoption of PRINCE2 project management methodologies, and the dedication of their team of technical analysts, the entire project was completed within both budget, and the allotted time-frame. In addition, and as defined during the project scoping phase, all quality expectations and acceptance criteria were successfully met, and the project was completed with zero disruption to staff.

The key functional features and benefits delivered to TaxAssist Direct post completion of the project are as follows:

- **Improved network performance:** All underlying performance bottlenecks have been eliminated, ensuring that network devices are able to communicate at their full bandwidth. Additionally the Cisco networking devices provide high availability and enhanced management capabilities for troubleshooting purposes.
- **Improved desktop performance:** The cleansing of desktop computers resulted in noticeable performance gains for end-users, particularly in relation to startup and logon times.
- **Increased security:** Security has been increased by ensuring that all hardware devices and network cables are securely located within the

existing data cabinet, thus reducing the likelihood of accidental damage to the infrastructure. In addition, the adoption of both security policies and a standardised desktop environment increases the control and management of the infrastructure whilst reducing the number of attack vectors open to a malicious user.



TaxAssist Accountants are the largest national network of accountants focusing solely on small businesses.

Breakwater IT

Based in Norwich, Breakwater IT brings together an array of highly skilled industry professionals competent in the design, development, implementation and support of information technology systems. We're dedicated to providing clients with the right IT solution to help take their business forward.

To find out how your business could benefit from a superior managed service provision from Breakwater IT, why not speak to a consultant today by calling: [01603 709300](tel:01603709300).

For further information about Breakwater IT please visit our website: www.breakwaterit.co.uk

“When making any technology recommendation, Breakwater IT always seeks to demonstrate both due-diligence, and a clear return-on-investment. Based on a history of deploying proven and reliable technology platforms, TaxAssist Direct continues to entrust into our best-of-breed philosophy – hence our enviable position as a key business partner. Long may this valued strong relationship continue!”

Stephen Bowles, Managing Director, Breakwater IT