



Being an expert in construction materials requires more than timber

Arnold Laver

Industry

Construction

Key challenges

- Legacy core infrastructure in need of upgrade
- Shortcomings in DR response
- Performance issues experienced with critical ERP application

Solution

- Refresh of server, network and storage infrastructure
- Deployment of new DR solution
- Ongoing third-line support service

Business benefits

- Reliable infrastructure to run the business on
- Ready to support new innovation in step with the business

Arnold Laver calls on Highlander to help refresh core infrastructure

Arnold Laver is a progressive family-run business that has traded for nearly 100 years. A major force in the UK timber industry, they strive to be the first-choice timber and timber-based products supplier to the construction, fit-out, and house-builder sectors.

Innovation in its practices is a big part of how Arnold Laver stays competitive and offers exceptional service to its customers. They identify that their IT systems are among the best in the business, helping to provide staff and customers with meaningful real-time data that shapes the experience of the company. To help make this possible, Arnold Laver has partnered with Highlander to overhaul its core infrastructure composed of network, server, and storage, and then provide ongoing hardware support for these systems.

Company overview

Founded in 1920 by Mr Arnold Laver, a returning veteran of the Great War, Arnold Laver has grown to become one of the UK's largest timber merchants. Today, they operate 15 depots, employ nearly 700 people and achieve revenues in excess of £120m per year.

The challenge

Having been an early advocate of the role good IT can play in a business, when the recession in the construction industry hit in 2007 Arnold Laver's ongoing investment in their core technology estate had to be reduced significantly. Following this period and with the industry recovering Managing Director, Andrew Laver appointed Mike Kenyon as the new IT Director to review and transform the IT systems in place.

"There was lots to do," comments Kenyon. "What were cutting-edge systems in their day were now feeling the load and struggling to do the job. The network, servers, and storage were stressed, and the ERP system, which is so important to our business, also needed review." With a small but capable internal IT team ready to support users and deal with much of the day-to-day management, Kenyon wanted an objective,



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Mike Kenyon, IT Director at Arnold Laver

outside opinion of the core systems driving Arnold Laver. “Highlander has a good local reputation, so I'd already heard of them. We didn't have time to go out to tender to look at lots of suppliers, so after talking to some peers, I invited them in to help.”

Following a 4-day discovery exercise, Highlander compiled a comprehensive report on the core infrastructure. It detailed what they perceived as the key risks Arnold Laver was facing and provided a series of recommendations and priorities over the next 24 months. At the heart of the report was the need to address ageing hardware, shore up security and implement more reliable disaster recovery (DR) measures.

The solution

Impressed by Highlander's technical acumen, Arnold Laver initially sought to engage them to help support the current infrastructure. “I like to have a reliable back-up standing behind my team, so we engaged Highlander to provide third-line support on all the network infrastructure we already had commissioned. We needed to know if there was an emergency there would be extra hands and additional expertise on call,” explains Kenyon. “By providing interim support they proved their technical capability and we were confident they could meet our permanent support needs. Then, as we got to know them, I felt comfortable that they would be more than able to assist us with implementing the priorities that had been identified in their report.”

One of the first priorities highlighted security vulnerabilities surrounding the company's email system and the number of breach alerts they were experiencing. In response, Highlander advised on and then deployed new email security tools to defend from inbound assaults that infiltrate through email.

Many of the servers hosting the business systems so important to Arnold Laver were also in need of a refresh. As an extensive HPE user, the Arnold Laver team had confidence in this brand and wanted to make use of their existing knowledge. Highlander therefore proposed that these systems be upgraded to more modern and powerful HPE machines so they could extend their virtualisation strategy. This would avoid additional training costs and ensure the team continue to use something familiar. The new servers created greater management efficiencies as multiple virtual servers could be run on three physical host servers. Similarly, attractive economies of scale as less hardware would be needed over time, and a level of agility for launching new applications that the business had not seen before was realised.

The most critical application Arnold Laver uses is BisTrack, a merchant and wholesaler software solution designed for use in the timber industry. Because they had not upgraded the software for some time, in tandem with the server refresh Highlander helped them to orchestrate the necessary updates to arrive at the latest edition of the software. This involved negotiating a path between legacy server operating systems for each subsequent release of the software, each version effectively



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Mike Kenyon, IT Director at Arnold Laver

becoming a stepping stone to eventually arrive at the newest release running on the latest server operating system, hosted on the newly deployed hardware.

Finally, DR, revealed as a pressing priority in the report, was addressed. With legacy storage hardware creating performance bottlenecks, Highlander proposed that the current solution be swapped for a modern all-flash storage array from Nimble Storage. Not only does this now deliver incredible sub-millisecond performance but locating a second array at Arnold Laver's DR site means that data can be replicated between sites every 15 minutes, and a switch from live to DR is undertaken in less than 30 minutes.

Business results and benefits

A reliable and sustainable infrastructure

"The existing infrastructure worked but if there was maintenance required, or there was even a hint of a problem we knew we could be in for some fun! Now we have an environment that is ready to support all the systems that are essential to our business and is fit to carry us into the future," says Kenyon.

Supporting innovation with flexible infrastructure

As Arnold Laver grows or new opportunities arise the business can make resources available to power new applications and services. "Our infrastructure now just works and is ready to scale. As long as we have available compute and storage capacity, we're ready for anything. The infrastructure is fully virtualised, so we can spin up new applications on-demand as the business needs them," claims Kenyon.

Confidence and protection

Arnold Laver truly considers the ramifications of inadequate DR. The implementation of a new DR solution properly protects all their critical data and ensures the systems are back in business having hardly missed a beat, even in the event of a major outage. Knowing they have an extended team of experts sitting behind their own thanks to the support contract also ensures further peace of mind for the business.

Honest real-world advice

With competing priorities and a delicate roadmap to success, it was important for Arnold Laver that they got sound advice from a partner prepared to invest in their fortunes. "There have been times where I've needed honest advice and a real-world picture - no 'sugar-coating' - and their technicians have given it. They are very knowledgeable and know what they're doing. When they say something, they mean it and we trust it."



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Specialist solutions



Infrastructure



Protection



Cloud



ERP



Workspace



Services

Working with Highlander



Highlander's support has been invaluable. They're always keen to help and not always looking to charge for simple things. They take a common-sense approach to business and we've established an excellent relationship. It's so easy to work with them — we really feel looked after." Kenyon sums up.