Ultima - Remote Working

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, organisations around the world found themselves needing to enable remote working at great speed and scale, in order to continue functioning. Ultima utilised its business continuity plan entailing a number of different technologies and tools to mobilise its workforce of 400 employees within a day, in order to maintain productivity.

Hardware & Telephony

**Requirement:** Ultima begun the process of mobilising its workforce a few years ago, so all employees had portable devices rather than desktops, which lends itself well for remote working. However, a large proportion of the team were using office-based phone systems, so a solution to this was needed.

**Solution:** Any additional headsets and equipment were sourced and calling systems were moved to Microsoft Teams to enable the workforce to make and answer calls remotely.

Chat & Collaboration

**Requirement:** Ultima had already rolled out Microsoft Teams to the workforce, but needed to accelerate adoption and start using key features such as all-company broadcasts and conference calling.

**Solution:** Ultima’s IT team set users up with the required functionality and permissions, allowing them to continue business as usual and conduct customer meetings virtually. Specific teams were created for collaboration and whole company broadcasts, and file servers were quickly migrated to SharePoint to aid secure B2B document sharing.

Access & Applications

**Requirement:** A lot of the systems and applications Ultima were already using are cloud-based, which is advantageous for a dispersed workforce. However, there were a number of key legacy applications that employees still need access to and some of these apps were performing poorly over VPN.

**Solution:** Ultima leveraged Citrix Virtual Desktop (formerly XenDesktop) through Azure to enable users to access the required applications efficiently, securely, and remotely.

Capacity & Optimisation

**Requirement:** Ultima’s remote working capability had been tested previously, however not at the scale required currently where the entire workforce are dispersed, creating a strain on infrastructure.

**Solution:** Through Ultima’s new Autonomous Extend solution, on-premises data centres and infrastructure can be extended to Azure almost instantly and completely remotely. This enables you to scale up or down in response to changing circumstances, thus optimising efficiency.

Security

**Requirement:** Ultima works with a number of key security partners to ensure that critical systems and data are protected at all times, however this scale of remote working always comes with a set of challenges. You need to ensure that all users, devices and data are secure regardless of location.

**Solution:** Ultima deploy a large number of solutions to ensure protection despite location, including: Multi Factor Authentication, remote device management, encryption and secure information sharing through Azure Active Directory and SharePoint.

User Education

**Requirement:** Although Ultima was able to quickly mobilise the workforce due to cloud adoption and forward planning, one of the key challenges is educating users so they know how to use the tools available.

**Solution:** Ultima launched a new Learning Portal, certified by the Microsoft Valued Professional Community, which is accessible to all employees and enables them to take training modules and test knowledge. Ultima’s 24/7 Technical Service Centre is also key in helping users with any support issues.

All this is made simpler by Ultima’s Autonomous Cloud, which continuously manages and monitors the Azure estate, optimising usage and producing real-time reports. This ensures that resources are being used to maximum efficiency and leaves the IT team to focus on other priorities.
Outcomes and Advantages

Microsoft Teams

- The meeting functionality in Teams has enabled employees to proceed with virtual face-to-face meetings with customers and suppliers, carrying on with business as usual, whilst also saving time, costs and resources compared to a physical meeting.
- Teams has actually increased internal collaboration, as Ultima now host regular all-company broadcasts from senior management, which can all be easily recorded so that employees unable to attend can watch them at a time that suits.
- Traditionally, telephony has been very hard to mobilise, however the roll-out of Microsoft Teams made this a fairly simple transition avoiding significant disruption or downtime.

Azure Cloud

- The move to Citrix Virtual Desktop in Azure significantly increased speed of access for remote employees, enabling them to be more productive.
- The move to SaaS subscription-based models is favourable in uncertain circumstances such as these, as it’s easily scalable, quick to deploy and requires lower upfront costs.
- Ultima’s Autonomous Cloud proactively monitors and manages the Azure environment, automating previously manual tasks and optimising performance. This results in lowered cost and increased operational efficiency.

Additional Capability

- The rapid need to mobilise the workforce has introduced a new set of capabilities which will be useful for the future, such as setting up new starters remotely. This is not only critical in the current circumstances, but will also reduce time and costs when setting up geographically dispersed employees who might not be office-based.
- Through the Learning Portal, employees can learn new skills at a time that suits them and managers can set their teams specific modules to complete and keep track of progress. This is also an extremely useful platform for training new staff remotely.
- By working with a number of key partners, Ultima deploy a wide range of security and back-up policies, ensuring that devices, data and users are protected from risks regardless of their physical location. This is key to supporting simple access solutions and safeguarding the business against threats.
- By having a thorough business continuity plan, backed up by key technologies and able to be quickly adjusted in Azure, Ultima were able to mobilise the entire workforce extremely quickly and actually increase productivity, whilst ensuring systems are secure and optimised.

About Ultima

Ultima Business Solutions has developed into a leading intelligent infrastructure and automation services company, focused on the provision of tailored solutions and services, including the design, deployment and support of complex IT solutions, based on industry leading technologies. These are delivered by Ultima’s extensive team of highly skilled technical personnel that include solutions architects, consultants, engineers, project managers and service operations staff.

Our key vendors have recognised our strategic importance to them. Citrix named us Worldwide Partner of the Year for EMEA. HPE awarded us Value Partner of the Year and we won Computing’s AI and Machine Learning Award for Best Use of Automation. Microsoft have recognised us as a Gold Partner for over 25 years and we have accumulated 12 Gold competencies spanning App Dev, Microsoft Azure, Data Management Business Apps and many more.

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