NODE4

SERVICEMASTER LTD
THE IMPORTANCE OF UPTIME

ServiceMASTER®

ServiceMaster Ltd, a leading nationwide franchisor, was experiencing issues caused by an unreliable and unstable IT platform for its Workflow Management System, used to manage and allocate work to its network of franchisees. The company was not able to operate as effectively as it desired and required a trusted IT partner to provide a new platform that would increase uptime and introduce contingency provisions.

THE NEED FOR 100% AVAILABILITY

Operating in the UK for over 50 years, ServiceMaster Ltd is a franchisor with over 700 franchise licenses established around the country. The company offers a variety of cleaning and furniture repair services as well as disaster restoration.

To deliver its flagship disaster restoration service, ServiceMaster Ltd works closely with insurance providers. When responding to claims caused by fire or flooding, for example, insurers request technicians to provide detailed assessments and reports on damage before conducting the required cleaning and repairs.

This process is managed centrally by ServiceMaster Ltd's online Workflow Management System for all of its franchisees. During peak times this can result in very high volumes of data, for example in the case of widespread flooding. However, ServiceMaster Ltd required an IT system that would ensure 100% availability for its Workflow Management System regardless of the volume of jobs in the system.

ServiceMaster Ltd's IT infrastructure is therefore crucial to its success, ensuring that information is always shared quickly and correctly.

However, the company was struggling with its previous IT set up, with dedicated hardware colocated at the vendor's premises, due to poor reliability and stability, and a lack of real contingency provision should an issue arise, which, given the nature of ServiceMaster Ltd's work was unacceptable.

"Not only was our previous IT infrastructure not really up to scratch, we were also hampered by SLAs with our previous IT supplier that weren't strong enough. Maintaining a high service level is crucial to our IT operations, but when there were issues we were getting excuses rather than real support. As a result we were keen to move to a new supplier, but trust was a key issue for us - we needed to work with someone we knew was going to deliver on all of our reliability requirements, to give us a system that was fit for purpose."

Darshan Patel, IT Manager, ServiceMaster Ltd

ServiceMaster Ltd was focused on finding a supplier that had the technical expertise to deliver both the reliability and contingency provisions the business really needed from its IT system. Crucially the company also required an IT partner that could offer high levels of service and support on an ongoing basis.

Cost and accessibility were also key issues. Previously ServiceMaster Ltd had bought dedicated hardware from its IT supplier to support the Workflow Management System. However, maintenance costs of the equipment proved to be a significant burden. The fact that it was hosted in London meant that getting onsite to check the equipment was also a challenge, therefore ServiceMaster Ltd was keen to move its infrastructure and data closer to its Leicester offices.

Having been recommended by another partner, ServiceMaster Ltd approached Node4 to discuss the required specifications for its IT infrastructure and how it should be best implemented.

"We had a lot of options when looking for a new IT partner, but meeting Node4 was key. It was clear right from the start that they are an extremely professional team. Straight away we felt that Node4 would be a partner we could rely on to offer honest advice, deliver the best solution for our business and that would respond quickly to deal with any issues directly."

Darshan Patel, IT Manager, ServiceMaster Ltd

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enabling business to do business

PHASED UPGRADE

Node4 recommended a two-phase transition. In the first phase ServiceMaster Ltd's platform moved to new equipment hosted at Node4's Derby data centre, before moving to a fully virtualised environment in the second phase, again hosted at the same site.

The initial phase was completed over the course of one month - including all of the planning, migrating and configuration of the new infrastructure. ServiceMaster Ltd leased the new equipment from Node4 to minimise CAPEX. Node4 also provided a backup system to ensure loss of data was not an issue. Node4's Derby data centre not only offers the level of security ServiceMaster Ltd required for its hardware and data, but also means that it is much easier for ServiceMaster Ltd to get onsite and monitor its equipment whenever it needs to.

After the successful completion of the first phase, planning began for the switch to a fully virtual environment.

The desire to move to a virtualised environment was motivated by ServiceMaster Ltd's needs in terms of resiliency and maximizing availability. In the event of a hardware issue the virtual system can automatically recover the services to an alternative server node with minimal customer downtime rather than having to rebuild or replace existing dedicated hardware. The inherent scalability of a virtual environment also means that ServiceMaster Ltd would be able to add further functionality and new services to its solution further down the line almost instantaneously.

Node4 based ServiceMaster Ltd's virtual data centre solution on a Cisco Unified Computing System (UCS) Blade Platform connecting to an EMC VNX Storage Array. The virtual environment is delivered via VMware's vCloud Suite. The connectivity to ServiceMaster Ltd is delivered over a VPN connection via Node4's N4Cloud solution.

The migration and implementation of the virtual environment proved challenging, as it had to be completed in one weekend. If it had not been achieved then ServiceMaster Ltd would have been set back by three months until the next suitable opportunity to perform the switch.

Planning for the migration was completed in one month. Node4 built the cloud solution in their data centre in advance, allowing ServiceMaster Ltd to parallel test the system with its previous architecture to ensure the system met all of their requirements. Having pre-validated the solution Node4 was able to seamlessly perform the final transition to the new virtual environment in the allotted weekend so that the system was up and ready to use for the Monday morning.

"Node4 really pulled out all of the stops to make the migration happen. The support of our dedicated account manager and the technical team really was second to none and it ensured that the upgrade took place with no appreciable impact on our franchisees."
Darshan Patel, IT Manager, ServiceMaster Ltd

Node4 provides ongoing support for ServiceMaster Ltd with a dedicated technical team which is accessible any time of day. ServiceMaster Ltd can contact the team directly or through an online ticketing system to provide quick responses and ensure urgent items are prioritised correctly.

"With Node4 there is always someone on the end of the phone that we know will be able to deal with any issue quickly and efficiently. This support continues to be invaluable to our business and is very reassuring for my whole team."
Darshan Patel, IT Manager, ServiceMaster Ltd

MAKING THE MOST OF A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

The new infrastructure has delivered significant benefits to ServiceMaster Ltd. Crucially the reliability of the Workflow Management System has been increased. Node4 operates a 'five nines' SLA with ServiceMaster Ltd, providing 99.999% availability for the new system, based on Node4's enterprise grade data centre, even during periods of high demand. Soon after the transition the company experienced a huge increase in requests due to flooding and throughout this period ServiceMaster Ltd did not experience a second of downtime despite the volume of work being processed.

Since moving to a fully virtual environment there have been no outages.

"The virtual environment Node4 has provided is a complete step change in terms of IT infrastructure and the service we are able to provide as a result. It really is a world away from the system we had before we began working with Node4."
Darshan Patel, IT Manager, ServiceMaster Ltd

Node4 has also helped improve the speed and responsiveness of the online portal to ensure that there is no lag for franchisees

using the site. The system has been designed to be more robust and to minimise processing demands on the client side to keep the site responsive for users.

In moving to a virtual environment, ServiceMaster Ltd also upgraded to a 10Mb network connection from Node4. This has enabled the company to support increasing mobile access to its Workflow Management System through its mobile app - a key step for ServiceMaster Ltd as it increases the ability of its franchisees to respond to requests whenever and wherever they are.

Since upgrading its IT system with Node4, ServiceMaster Ltd has successfully grown its business. It has taken on more franchisees and throughout this process the IT infrastructure has been able to handle increasing numbers of users and demands without losing any reliability or stability. (which would not have been possible with the previous IT system… e.g.)

"Since we have partnered with Node4 we have been able to introduce a range of new capabilities and ways of working to improve how we do business and to increase the support for our franchisees. None of that would have been possible without Node4 - everything we do is dependent on having a stable and reliable IT system." - Darshan Patel, IT Manager, ServiceMaster Ltd

Looking ahead ServiceMaster Ltd is now taking full advantage of its virtualised system to carry out further software enhancements for its online Workflow Management System. The company is also expanding the use of the system to other brands and services in the ServiceMaster Ltd family alongside the disaster restoration service.

"The level of service Node4 provides really is incredible. Every member of the team goes above and beyond what is asked of them. Right from the start Node4 has really understood our business and have been able to tailor solutions for the specific requirements that we have. They are a fantastic partner for our business, and I can honestly say I can't see myself working with another IT supplier."

Darshan Patel, IT Manager, ServiceMaster Ltd