

# The Cloud-enabled enterprise

**CASE STUDY** How will cloud-savvy companies operate five years from now? Jessica Twentyman looks to the future

It is mid-July 2015 and business is booming at Hollister Garden Style (HGS) Limited, a UK-based manufacturer of garden furniture. The Met Office has forecasted a long, hot August and the good weather, they believe, is set to last into September.

The company's directors know this represents a great opportunity to capitalise on customer demand for outdoor furniture sets and parasols – but are the computing resources at HGS's disposal up to the task?

The answer is yes, because over the past five years, HGS has made impressive progress on migrating its systems and services to the cloud. For CIO Patrick Bradford, who has led this effort from the start, the pressure is now on to find out exactly what his colleagues in the business will need in order to meet the ambitious sales targets that the company's managing director has set, both for this year and for Summer 2016.

Bradford's first meeting of the day is with HGS's sales and marketing director. She is planning to take on seasonal call-centre staff during August, in order to meet an anticipated spike in orders from garden centres and individual online customers in the UK, Germany and France.

That's no problem at all, Bradford tells her. He will contact HGS's provider of hosted customer relationship management (CRM) applications and provision 20 extra seats for the month of August. At the end of that month, they will meet again to decide if they'll still need those extra seats in September. If not, the requirement can easily be scaled down again – something that generally happens over the Autumn and Winter months at HGS every year, in response to seasonal sales patterns.

Bradshaw's next stop is the finance department, where accountants are preparing to run some pretty sophisticated financial models that will allow them to predict likely 2016 revenue patterns, based on this year's to-date sales totals.

They'll need extra computing resources to perform their calculations – and those resources will be ready whenever they need them, Bradshaw tells them. All the CFO needs to do is to provision a virtual machine from within HGS's private cloud environment. He can do that himself, through a portal-style interface that makes the job simple. Once he has entered his requirements on the online form, the process of provisioning the necessary compute resources – and de-

commissioning the virtual machine when it is no longer needed – will be fully automated.

Mid-morning, Bradshaw receives a call from HGS's head of product development. The plans for next year's range of Fairtrade bamboo sun loungers are coming along well, she says, but it's looking likely that the company's designers will require extra storage space for their computer-aided design (CAD) files.

Bradshaw knows that he could probably accommodate these requirements behind the company firewall, within HGS's private cloud.

Looking to a cloud-based future

But it makes more economic sense, he decides, to store it offsite, using storage space from a third-party infrastructure-as-a-service provider. He will assess a range of providers, he tells the head of product development, and get back to her tomorrow.

Back in the IT department, Bradshaw checks up on the company's small team of application developers. They're currently building an application that will enable the company's canvas suppliers in India and West Africa to receive orders from HGS and work with the company's sales staff on delivery schedules.

But the heavy-duty workstations and expensive tools for building that application are a thing of the past. HGS's developers are using a platform-as-a-service offering that allows them to access a sophisticated hosted development environment through a simple web browser.

Once the application is built, it will continue to reside in the cloud – although Bradshaw and his team haven't decided who will host it yet. Fortunately, cloud standards are now sufficiently mature that the option is there to shift the application between different providers, if the team identify a provider that can give them a better deal. Plus, clever use of application programming interfaces (APIs) mean that the application will be perfectly capable of sharing data with HGS's hosted warehouse management system.

Later on, Bradshaw attends a monthly meeting of HGS's board of directors. On today's agenda is a discussion of how well the company is doing in meeting its environmental targets. Bradshaw is proud to tell them that, through smart use of cloud computing resources, HGS will spend 35 per cent less on power and cooling servers and desktops this year than it did back in 2010.

Also, the company's recent implementation of state-of-the-art videoconferencing equipment – using hosted networking resources that are paid for on a month-by-month, per-usage basis – has cut travel miles dramatically. Company directors no longer need to fly to Stuttgart and Lyon to meet with their colleagues in HGS's German and French subsidiaries. In fact, several of those colleagues are attending this very meeting, albeit virtually.

A planned implementation of SaaS-based supply chain management software, scheduled for the quieter Autumn months, Bradshaw adds, will also do a great deal to cut down on transportation miles and costs.

The hosted application will enable HGS to optimise allocation of delivery contracts to a wider range of transportation operators. The more carriers the company uses, the more likely it will be able to identify carriers with trucks scheduled to return empty from deliveries. By filling those trucks with garden furniture, he explains, there will be less 'empty running' and so fewer carbon emissions.

With today's meetings over, Bradshaw returns to his department to order new seats from the company's SaaS CRM provider and to perform some due diligence on potential providers of storage space for those hefty CAD files. But there's one task that he doesn't need to worry about – supervising an overnight back-up of HGS's systems and files. Thanks to the systems management and automation tools that the company has in place, this happens automatically. All files are backed-up to an eminently scaleable disaster recovery site hosted by a third party on HGS's behalf. For Bradshaw, a busy day is over.



## Industry View

**AAD DEKKERS** chief marketing officer at MTI Europe

At MTI customer **Cobweb Solutions**, an eminently flexible, scalable and high-performance cloud computing environment isn't a distant dream. It's reality today.

Cobweb started life in 1996 as a provider of hosted Microsoft Exchange systems to small businesses and now has more customers and more mailboxes than any other Microsoft Exchange hosting business in Europe.

Today, the company is seeing increasing demand from large enterprises, too, and its range of offerings has grown to encompass other software-as-a-service (SaaS) products, such as Microsoft SharePoint and Dynamics CRM systems. Desktop as a Service (DaaS) is also a hot topic and will be part of the next wave of services. As Cobweb looks to the future, it plans to offer customers a whole catalogue of on-demand private and public cloud services.

With that in mind, it is using the very latest in virtualisation and cloud-computing technologies to ensure that its infrastructure will scale to meet customers' current and future needs.

It has worked with MTI to create a high-performance IT infrastructure based on VBlock – a pre-integrated stack of storage, servers and switches, complete with a virtualisation layer and a full set of management tools, from the

Virtual Computing Environment (VCE) coalition of VMware, Cisco and EMC. Prior to deployment, that infrastructure was thoroughly sized and tested in MTI's Solution Centre.

As one of the first organisations in Europe to implement a VBlock1, Cobweb is now in a strong position to confidently plan new or expanded services.

"Our customers expect both top-end service level agreements [SLAs] and value for money, so we can't afford to compromise on performance or cost," explains Cobweb CEO Paul Hannam. "The VBlock technology enables us to offer both in an efficient, flexible and scalable way and to rise to new challenges as our company continues to grow and expand in scope."

