



Greater security,
resilience and
availability deliver
cost-savings,
productivity gains
and enhance
employees'
work-life balance

THE CLIENT

EAST LANCASHIRE RAILWAY

Attracting over 200,000 annual visitors, the East Lancashire Railway is one of Greater Manchester's premier tourist attractions.

Hosting historic steam and diesel locomotives, the 12.5-mile heritage line runs from Heywood through to Rawtenstall. The Flying Scotsman is a regular visitor.

Whilst employing a core staff, ELR is dependent upon an army of volunteers and, as a charity, the generosity of the public and corporate sponsors such as Avoira.



Business Needs

ELR's IT network infrastructure was aged, fragmented and fragile. This hosted all the charity's central systems, including file storage, email and other applications.

The first thing to say is a huge thank you to all our volunteers who had created our IT infrastructure from scratch and had maintained it for a number of years. Their achievements in this area have been impressive and have been key to the development of the ELR.

However, it was time to move to cloud computing, our existing infrastructure included aging and consistently failing servers, slow, copper-enabled internet and dependence on slave PCs for home working. The infrastructure failed to inspire confidence, notes ELR's Business Support Manager Nicola Rooney.



Staff adopting their own methods of working and software solutions added further complication and inefficiency.

Chairman Mike Kelly recognised that IT was holding back ELR and pushed the business towards a cloud solution. Aside from other benefits this would enable hybrid working, a model the charity was keen to embrace. "We did not have the internal knowledge or expertise to deliver cloud computing and turned to Avoira" explains Nicola.





The Solution

Having identified ELR's business objectives, Avoira worked with the charity to develop a partnership programme. This incorporated a detailed IT road map, opening with the implementation of a Managed Service plan to provide ELR with instant support for its existing systems via on-site and remote services.

That takeover also enabled Avoira's engineers to conduct a full audit of the network and plot the most effective path forward.

Phase two saw migration of email from a near end-of-life Exchange 2013 server to Microsoft's anywhere-anytime Office 365. "Previously there had been times when the server went down and we were without email for the best part of a week," recalls Nicola.



"Transformative is the only way I can describe it, the partnership with Avoira is invaluable and the Avoira Team are now indispensable to ELR."



New laptops were then rolled out to replace struggling hardware and ensure staff who had previously been allocated desktop PCs could be unshackled from offices.

Next the Avoira team implemented a major yet low-cost network upgrade. This saw outmoded and expensive ADSL lines replaced with fibre-to-the cabinet (FTTC) and substitution of the old copper cabling with an inter-site virtual private network (VPN).

In addition, the IT network was restructured, with equipment replaced prior to a full migration to the cloud to enable decommissioning of those creaky old servers.

"Avoira took those servers away. I wanted to hit them with a hammer, that was the level of frustration they caused," Nicola says wryly.



The Benefits

“Transformative is the only way I can describe it” enthuses Nicola. “The partnership with Avoira is invaluable and the Avoira Team are now indispensable to ELR.”

This enthusiasm comes from delivery of an impressively reliable and secure integrated solution that has significantly boosted productivity, secured cost benefits and enabled hybrid working.

Rather than adopting their own distinct methods of working and chosen software, users now work across the same platform and applications such as Microsoft Outlook, Teams and SharePoint.

“This solution definitely delivers ongoing cost benefits,” reports Nicola. “We are moving to Microsoft Teams for meetings and calls and reducing landline and mobile phone costs”.

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“We’re also saving through greater productivity. I’m so much more effective now that we have the right tools for the job.”

She additionally cites the importance the introduction of end-point encryption and further security in supporting ELR’s commitment to data protection.

Nicola is particularly impressed with how the transition to the cloud has empowered staff and enhanced their working lives through the introduction of a hybrid model.

“It’s enabled us to do something we’d previously never been able to do which is give employees a healthy work-life balance. Working from home just wasn’t feasible before.”

The availability and quality of technical support is another major plus-point.

“The Avoira staff are just amazing. They go above and beyond anything that we could have expected of them. They’re very knowledgeable, expert, helpful, friendly and at the same time really professional.”

That team is now working - full-steam ahead! - on further enhancements to the railway’s IT infrastructure and systems.