

M62



Cloud Computing ROI Is Sky-High For One SME

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Case Studies

As the IT world waits for the various forms of cloud computing to really take hold in large enterprises, stories of small businesses doing amazing things with the cloud continue to pour in. What's holding the large enterprises back? Fear of the unknown, i.e., an unwillingness to take on with perceived security risks.

M62 - a British firm that helps some of the world's biggest companies strategise, develop and deliver sales presentations - is one of the small businesses that has experienced real ROI with cloud computing.

Recently, I spoke with Nick Oulton, the company's CEO. Oulton, it just so happens, is a huge proponent of cloud computing, and his company runs just about everything in the cloud. "If it's not SaaS, we're not interested," he says.

M62 uses Salesforce.com for CRM and accounting and NetSuite's OpenAir for project management. Nuts-and-bolts phone and email communications run on a hosted IP telephony system and a subscription Microsoft Exchange service with an Outlook Web Access front end.

The firm has even developed its own signature slide-hosting service that lets clients easily find individual slides. The slide service uses a proprietary algorithm to re-assemble them into whatever presentation is needed.

The only IT asset M62 has kept in-house is its basic file-serving system, and even that is backed up using a cloud service.

Ask Oulton what the centerpiece of the company's cloud environment is, and he points to OpenAir, which he says is key to M62 being able to expand its business much faster than it has to increase staff.

The reason? Unlike the service M62 used previously, OpenAir is a task-oriented system that can, for instance, notify a project manager that a deadline might slip because someone on the team has to work temporarily on something else. This level of granular responsiveness has enabled Oulton's project managers to double their load of simultaneous projects to as many as 60.

The proof is in the results: when M62 started using OpenAir two years ago, it had a staff of 28 and revenue of about \$2.5 million. Revenue has since doubled, while the staff has only grown to 32. M62 also is enjoying many of the typical cloud benefits. It's able to operate as a virtual global organisation, with employees working from offices and homes in Liverpool, U.K., New York City, and Singapore. That allows it to operate across time zones, and enjoy a global recruiting base for a set of skills that are, as Oulton puts it, "bloody hard to find."

It also enables M62 to operate in a way that puts its large clients at ease. Oulton says any concerns clients have about working with a small company located in the U.K. dissipate as soon as they start to see how responsive M62 can be, thanks to its cloud environment.

But ultimately - and this should resonate with large-enterprise CIOs out there - the real value of the cloud for M62 is in the company's ability to easily accommodate major growth with minimal disruption to the business. Even if more staff is needed, they can be brought into the fold quickly and easily.

"The only way we're going to scale the business and be able to cope with the rapid growth I expect to experience in the next three to five years," says Oulton, "is to have a very flexible model and let people work from wherever they are."

In other words, without the cloud, M62 would be a nice little British company. With it, Oulton's team is a global presentation resource. Not a bad deal.