

Axminster Tool Centre

AXMINSTER
TOOL CENTRE

...tools to your door



CASE STUDY

Smoother Operator

Benefits

Saving time and money

Improving efficiency

Improved work / life balance

Lower cost of ownership

Reduced carbon footprint

Improved resilience and power

“

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”

Damion Norcombe,
ICT Manager
Axminster Tool Centre

How Axminster Tool Centre solved its product data problem

Distributing, retailing and warehousing over 14,000 active products naturally creates a lot of related information which it's vital to manage effectively for a smooth-running operation.

Axminster Tool Centre distributes and retails a wide selection of tools and machinery worldwide, with its IT department regularly bringing new applications online to cope with the associated data. Until recently, each innovation would typically require the deployment of a new server, which over time had led to an over-crowded data centre that was delivering diminishing returns. “We were experiencing serious performance issues, which were costing us a lot in terms of wasted time,” says Damion Norcombe, Axminster's ICT Manager. “It was even getting to the point where customers were suffering, with orders taking a long time from placement to fulfilment.”

The heart of the problem was the large and expanding number of servers: “Not only were they underperforming, but the majority were also underutilised and starting to age,” says Norcombe.

A new approach

By late 2007, it was clear a total rethink was needed. “We talked to IBM Premier Business Partner Apex Computers, who were able to provide the consultancy we were after as well as the products,” says Norcombe. “The team floated the idea of virtualising all our server needs, which is not something I'd considered.

Apex Client Manager Ben Spode invited Axminster into Apex to demonstrate a VMware virtualisation solution “to prove the business benefits of better management, improved resilience and more efficient use of power”.

Although Norcombe admits to being sceptical, he soon saw what virtualisation could deliver.

The resulting solution has VMware virtualisation software running on two IBM System x3850 M2 servers, with a Fibre Channel storage area network (SAN) for redundancy and resilience based on an IBM DS4700 array.

Adding value

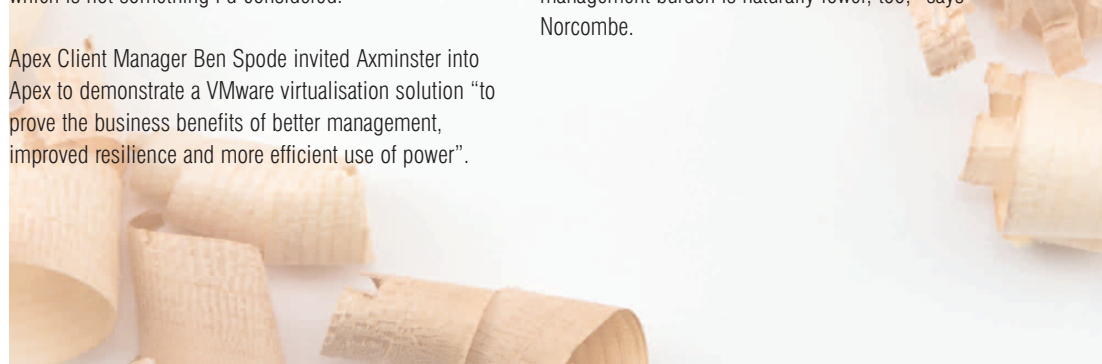
“Apex understood that we couldn't just take down the old system during the working day. Their ability to work with us on minimising disruption was greatly appreciated.”

“Working with Apex has really added value to our business. They have worked with us to evolve our business and improve our processes. It's improved our work/life balance as we used to spend a lot of time out of hours installing updates. Now we can deploy the latest technology during business hours which takes minutes says Norcombe”.

Time and money

“Although it's early days, I can already see where we'll be saving money,” says Norcombe. “We're currently running Sage Line 100 software, with plans to move to Sage Line 200. We can cope easily with new projects like this now, as we no longer need to deploy yet another new server. We just need to go and buy the software. New applications take minutes not weeks to implement.”

Audits and assessments have also become easier, as well as general housekeeping, like upgrades and patches. “The management burden is naturally lower, too,” says Norcombe.



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Prioritised data

The new setup allows for the tiering of stored data, helping to maximise Axminster's investment and lower the cost of ownership of its IT. There is now 'gold level' data, stored for easy retrieval, a 'silver level' one step below that, and a 'bronze level' offering low-cost storage for archiving.

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"The whole implementation was achieved with a minimum of downtime," he continues. "When it came to training, we found we didn't need a great deal as we'd learned so much as we went along."

Norcombe is also delighted that his department's environmental footprint had been greatly reduced. "Energy consumption is right down, with fewer servers and power saved on cooling systems, so we're a lot greener, and that's important these days," he says.

About Apex Computers

Apex is a leading IBM Premier Business Partner, a HP Preferred Partner, a Cisco Premier Partner, and a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner.

At Apex we strive to maintain long term partnerships with our clients, and the continuing relationships that we have with clients such as HMV Group, Arcadia and Admiral Insurance is testament to the high quality of service we provide.

What we do:

- We help you address the challenges that affect your IT infrastructure
- Provide cost-effective technology solutions
- Ensure that you are maximising your IT investments.

Working with us will ensure that your IT systems are effective in helping you create and maintain a competitive edge.

