

### Irish Times



*“Our new, virtualised IT environment running on powerful HP servers and SANs, designed and implemented with first-rate technical guidance from PFH, is delivering all the benefits in productivity and value for money we had hoped for.”*

*Colin Sharpe, IT Services Manager, Irish Times*

**PFH Technology Group helps the Irish Times create a state-of-the-art IT environment for its new location in Dublin.**

#### Challenge

- Build a new, modern IT infrastructure
- Move systems to new premises in limited time
- No disruption to tight production schedule

#### Solution

- 3 x HP Proliant DL585 server
- 2 x HP StorageWorks EVA4000
- VMware ESX Server
- VMware VMotion

#### Results

- Installation project completed smoothly
- Increased capacity and flexibility
- Greatly improved resilience
- Improved manageability
- Reduced system costs

With an eventful history at the centre of Irish affairs going back over 150 years, the Dublin-based Irish Times can well claim to be the paper of record for Ireland. Leading international figures often contribute to its columns and it enjoys an enviable reputation for independence and quality.

As a major national daily newspaper with a circulation in excess of 100,000, the Irish Times is completely dependant on IT systems to support all aspects of its publication. Editorial processes from workflow to layout are semi-automated, as are the production processes that assemble all the content and prepare it for printing. Of equal importance are the applications that manage the commercial operations of advertising and newspaper sales, which are the main sources of revenue for the business.

About 500 people are involved in either running the business or producing the paper and with a relentless daily publication schedule, the IT services they rely on have to be both responsive and completely reliable.

#### The challenge

The aging IT infrastructure at the Irish Times had suffered from inevitable deterioration over time, plus the cumulative effects of a highly reactive approach to meeting demands for new services. In the hectic business environment of a daily newspaper, IT management have to respond quickly and there is little time for restructuring.

Numerous ad hoc additions of application systems to address new business needs had created

a large, complex network of servers that were becoming increasingly difficult to manage. Also, the old premises at D’Olier Street, which the organisation had occupied for over 100 years, had severe space constraints that often dictated the shape of IT solutions.

The management at the Irish Times knew that a new, flexible IT infrastructure was needed sooner rather than later. So when the decision to move to a modern, open plan building on Tara Street was taken, they seized the opportunity to invest in a completely new infrastructure that would meet their future needs.

The challenging task of establishing a state-of-the-art IT infrastructure for the Tara Street building, that leveraged the latest advances in technology, fell to Colin Sharpe, IT Services Manager. “We knew that it was vital to devise a strategy for migrating all the critical services in daily use from the existing systems to the new infrastructure, without disruption to the production schedule,” says Colin.

#### Planning the solution

Colin felt strongly that careful planning and preparation was key to the success of the project, so his first task was to find an expert IT partner to review the current set up, analyse the company’s requirements and create a specification for the new infrastructure. A number of leading IT suppliers were evaluated and, as a result, PFH Technology Group was selected for this crucial phase. “PFH impressed us with the technical expertise of its consultants and priced its services competitively,” observes Colin.

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With technical guidance from PFH, Colin and his team reviewed the latest developments in virtualisation, SAN and server technology to determine the best approach for consolidating their numerous servers and establishing a coherent, scalable platform for the future. PFH also brought in experts from HP to demonstrate the different attributes of rack servers and blades, which provided valuable input.

The outcome of this collaborative effort was a sophisticated design based on VMware virtual servers running on HP ProLiant server hardware and featuring resilient HP StorageWorks EVA based centralised storage. Colin was convinced that VMware led the field in virtualisation and, because of his past experience, favoured HP hardware. "The performance and reliability of our existing HP servers had been excellent, and the ability to obtain all servers and storage from a single supplier, knowing they were guaranteed to work together, was compelling," he explains.

Because of the substantial size of the investment, a competitive tender process was invoked. After a rigorous selection exercise, PFH was again chosen. Key factors in the decision were that PFH had proven its technical capabilities and, most importantly, had a close working relationship with HP and knew its products well.

#### Implementing the solution

Colin knew that the process of building the new infrastructure, migrating all services from the old systems and moving to the new building, without impacting daily production of a major newspaper, was going to be a major logistical and technical challenge. To make certain that this critical undertaking was executed successfully, six months before the move he assembled a joint team with PFH, taking control of the project himself and with PFH's CTO providing technical leadership.

To minimise risk, the new servers and storage systems were first built and configured at the old building and the business applications migrated. While this was taking place, the old servers continued to operate, providing a backup if problems arose. This ensured that the paper's production activities were not disrupted and that the new systems were proven and stable before being relocated.

PFH led the technical activities and brought in HP SAN experts to make sure that the advanced storage systems were optimally configured. In addition, the engineers from PFH worked closely with Colin's staff when setting up the new systems to make sure that the necessary skills were passed on.

The move itself required careful planning and timing was critical. As the paper is published six days a week, there was only a small window each Saturday when moving could take place. Such a

large organisation could not be moved in one day, so the business was divided into three separate functional areas and moved over three consecutive weekends.

Each Saturday morning at 4 am, a joint team of PFH and Irish Times technicians took down the designated systems at D'Olier Street and shipped them to the new building. The same team then rebuilt them and got them running again. On each occasion, by Saturday afternoon the newspaper's staff were able to start working again at the new premises. This rapid relocation was made possible by the flexibility and modularity of the new systems architecture and helped by the powerful system management tools available.

"For such a complex undertaking, the move went amazingly smoothly and there was no disruption to the publication schedule whatsoever," observes Colin, adding, "The close rapport that PFH have established with our IT staff was a key factor in the success of the project."

#### The Results

The Irish Times has now been at Tara Street for more than a year and Colin is justifiably proud of the benefits his modern, new IT infrastructure is delivering to the business. "We have been able to replace over 40 of our old machines with a virtual server environment running across just three powerful HP ProLiant servers. The new technology delivers huge savings through reduced hardware, space and energy costs, while providing greater power and reliability," he reports.

The VMware virtualised server environment is inherently resilient, as services get automatically switched to a working system in the event of failure. And adding new applications can be accomplished in minutes, without the need to install a new physical server.

Centralised HP SAN storage is also resilient and is much easier to backup or extend than server attached storage. The Disaster Recovery (DR) options it enables are especially valuable. PFH was instrumental in helping to establish an effective DR strategy, and the Irish Times now has a backup SAN located remotely at a location in City West outside Dublin, which is updated in real time.

For Colin, a particularly beneficial outcome of this successful project is the fact that he now has trusted partners in PFH and HP that he can rely on. "We enjoy an excellent working relationship with PFH and have complete confidence in its technical capabilities, says Colin. "And we have been so pleased with the hardware support service we receive from HP that it has now been extended to include other manufacturers' equipment."