



CASE STUDY

Thomas Sanderson

Full IT Support



Unified Communications



Cloud



Security & Compliance



Network & Infrastructure



REQUIREMENT: VSPHERE AND STORAGE REFRESH, FIREWALL, REVERSE PROXY AND DIRECT ACCESS



When Thomas Sanderson needed to invest heavily in its IT environment, the company turned to its IT partner GCI to ensure high-quality advice and a smooth transition.

THE CLIENT

Thomas Sanderson is part of the Hunter Douglas group - one of the world's largest manufacturers and suppliers of window coverings. It has grown from a family business to an international company, having manufactured blinds in Britain for over 25 years. The company has a head office located in Waterlooville, Hampshire, employing approximately 300 office staff and around 300 remote field-based sales and installations agents.

While the company's existing servers and applications had worked very well in the past, the growth of their business meant that it required new software and hardware to support the increased number of users, with additional capacity needed from the aging storage. The estate had been very well maintained and the company had efficiently utilised its existing hardware; however, the life of the infrastructure had reached its natural end, with the VMware environment running on three physical host servers which had reached their End of Support. With business increasing at a healthy rate and the company wishing to continue with the mindset of investing in its IT, Thomas Sanderson turned to partner GCI to assist in the next stages of its infrastructure's evolution.

Over the course of more than two years, GCI worked with Thomas Sanderson on a number of major projects to accommodate the business' growth, including the implementation of two new FortiGate Firewalls in High Availability, a Reverse Proxy solution to handle complex web forms, a new backup solution, and the refresh of its infrastructure and storage provisions. There have also been several other additional projects, such as a Proof of Concept for Microsoft Direct Access to accommodate remote users, plus a new infrastructure for the company's telephony platform.

SECTOR: Retail



TECHNICAL SOLUTION

With a forward-thinking approach to its IT, Thomas Sanderson required solutions that not only afforded it the very best and latest technologies but also future-proofed its investments, delivering a reliable, scalable and stable environment that could grow with the business. To replace the existing older host servers, GCI recommended four new physical ESX servers with the capability to upgrade to the latest version of VMware. This ensured that the servers were now in a more robust, supported state, with the company's virtual environment running the latest version of vSphere and improving performance. Additionally, the existing storage was replaced with a new EMC SAN to provide Thomas Sanderson with a more powerful and scalable storage solution, as well as new fibre switching for host servers to connect back to the EMC storage.

Thanks to the business' growth and therefore increased usage, the combination of the throughput of the single Cisco PIX Firewall and 200MB Virgin leased line that was in place at Thomas Sanderson were becoming less reliable. GCI recommended two Fortinet Unified Threat Cluster (UTM) systems, which not only included a firewall which would withstand future business growth, but additional industry-leading web filtering, antivirus and anti-spam protection. This was coupled with an F5 Reverse Proxy solution to allow for the reverse publishing of emails and complex web forms.

With a large amount of business-critical data stored in a combination of Veeam and Symantec services and two tape drives on site, Thomas Sanderson also required a robust and secure backup solution. Following a backup review, GCI recommended their SecureVault On-Premise provision – a hybrid solution powered by EVault from Carbonite. This method of backup offers the same benefits as SecureVault's Cloud service - such as the capability to back up both physical and virtual machines, as well as providing LAN-based backup and restore options for increased performance - but is suitable for businesses such as Thomas Sanderson that have very large amounts of data for storage. SecureVault On-Premise succeeded in consolidating the various physical and virtual backups into one efficient solution, with data de-duplicated locally and then securely transmitted to a second vault within GCI's Tier 3 datacentre, providing complete offsite protection.

Thomas Sanderson also had a great need to support their increasing number of remote workers, with circa 300 users needing to access network resources from different locations. GCI provided a Proof of Concept for its new desktop strategy, recommending Microsoft Direct Access so that employees could access company files safely at any time, no matter where in the country they were. The solution also eliminated the need for VPNs and provided both superior connectivity for the users and more functionality to enable the IT team to support them. This was enthusiastically received, with Thomas Sanderson rolling the strategy out to office staff as it upgraded or replaced devices to enable them to work from home, with a planned deployment for field-based staff in the near future.

SUCCESS AND COMPANY BENEFITS

The investment that Thomas Sanderson made in its IT has afforded the company a platform to drive its business agenda, with servers that could scale with business growth and a secure backup solution that removed its reliance on tape backup. The new Fortinet UTM solution offers a secure environment that is free from web-based threats, whilst employees can now easily yet safely access important company files remotely.

The team have been delighted with their new platform, and Thomas Sanderson has opted to use GCI for both 3rd Line escalation support and for 24/7 support and monitoring. With a highly-capable IT team already in place on-site, utilising the Flexible Support Service affords the company access to more than 140 technical experts, but is only billed for the time used. Subsequently, Thomas Sanderson has also entrusted GCI to provide consultation and work with its chosen communications provider IP Integration to offer a dedicated telephony platform for the company.

Kate Ayling, Business Improvement Director at Thomas Sanderson, said: *"Thomas Sanderson and GCI have been on a real journey, ensuring that our investment has resulted in a flexible and scalable IT environment. We are certain that this transformation will give us a competitive advantage, and look forward to our ongoing work with GCI."*

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