



Xterity Cloud Services ensures global education fitness company's uptime, access, availability

The Customer

In 1988, Brent Hallo and Jane Waller left Perth, Western Australia on a round-the-world adventure. In 1989, they made London their temporary home and Jane worked as an aerobics instructor, while Brent taught schoolboys math and science. They were struck by how little ongoing education there was for industry professionals, which prompted them to consider starting FitPro. On 4 May 1990, Fitness Professionals Ltd was born in London. The first issue of Pro Link (a 24-page spot colour publication which ultimately became Fitpro magazine) was sent to instructors that June. Soon after, they added professional insurance policies and, by the end of year one, FitPro had over 1,000 members and five members of staff. In 1991, FitPro introduced Professional Edge, a three-day group exercise event that also featured aqua and children's fitness. With international presenters, a small tradeshow and a social night with industry awards, the event provided a networking opportunity that upskilled UK instructors with the latest and future trends, knowledge and education. In 2015, as it celebrates its 25th year in business, FitPro now has over 150,000 members in 84 countries. It is a worldwide industry leader with a diverse portfolio that includes online personal training, certifications, web applications and mobile technology.

The Business Challenge

A confluence of factors, among them an outmoded infrastructure, hard drive failures, a lack of storage space and what Joe Kelly, FitPro Group Business Change Manager, defines as "significant issues with Outlook and Exchange," catalysed the company's desire to move to a more scalable, reliable and predictable solution. Ideally, a solution that didn't require any initial outlay or capital investment and something that could grow with the company, especially when it came to issues around multimedia storage.

"Frankly, our technology was increasingly unable to keep up with our dynamic and fast-paced growth. For example, as an educational company we produce a lot of raw footage," said Kelly. "The resulting files, not surprisingly, require a lot of memory and space.

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Joe Kelly,
Group Business Change Manager,
FitPro

“However, when that raw footage is no longer needed or is no longer timely, the core files still need to be preserved, preferably leveraging scalable storage within a dedicated data warehouse solution.”

Indeed, most of the content FitPro supplies is delivered by online portals that, naturally, rely heavily on the Internet. Kelly, who is responsible for supporting and fortifying all of the backend systems for the company’s e-commerce systems, in 2011, drafted an RFQ with this consideration top-of-mind. Ultimately, to identify a solution that would replace its current implementation of critical servers and storage infrastructure at its London-based headquarters with an innovative, robust and cost effective storage and virtualised server solution to include business continuity and disaster recovery.

The resulting solution would enable FitPro to benefit from the cost savings of purchasing less server hardware and using less power by migrating a portion of their onsite servers to the cloud while adding enhanced management, functionality and operational benefits associated with virtualisation and storage area networks (SANs).

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The Technical Challenge

According to Kelly, a myriad of technical challenges confronted prospective vendors. These included:

Server management. “A number of servers had already exceeded the recommended 3-4 year life span, with most out of manufacturer’s warranty. Additionally, sourcing of end of life server components was also becoming a problem. In fact, we very much wanted to move a portion of our existing servers to a virtual environment in the near future.”

Rapid server restoration. “We needed a reliable and quick method to restore from server failure that wouldn’t affect day-to-day business in the case of a mission critical server failure. Our current backup solution did not provide a prompt and resolute method of complete server restoration.”

Sensible power management. “Power management complexity increased with the number of servers in the business and failover was becoming more and more important to business continuity. UPS power capacity was simply unable to provide maximum uptime in case of a power failure.”

Leased line saturation. “Our leased line was increasingly becoming over utilised with web and remote connectivity and this was reflected on the speed and performance of all access through the current firewall solution.”

Storage and backup. “The amount of required data being stored over the last few years had increased massively and backup devices and storage capacity was quickly approaching its limit.”

Exchange servers. “Our Exchange servers were increasingly becoming not just an email solution, but also an essential storage area for email attachments and documents. The storage required was increasing in size in proportion to the user’s needs and requirements as the business increased. Sooner or later we were simply going to run out of room.”

As well as having to satisfy this essential criteria:

- Depending on where the Microsoft Dynamics GP server is hosted, connectivity from users in office to a hosted GP or hosted server to Microsoft Dynamics GP must be highly-available.
- Quick and straightforward process to commission new servers.
- Efficient management of storage (administration, reporting and troubleshooting) Exchange 2010/ SharePoint 2010.

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Manager,
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- Management tools should be provided to monitor performance on either a physical or virtual platform. They should also include detailed features of the tools and how they can be used to optimise and allocate resources across the proposed infrastructure.
- Daily image and file level backups. Virtual machines should have their images backed-up and also have the facility to provide snapshot backup. Physical machines should have an SLA on hard drive changes and rebuilds in case of failure.
- An ability to take point in time snapshots (images) of servers that can be quickly restored (e.g. used in event of Operating System Service Pack/Application update failure).
- All redundancy should be clearly detailed and there should be a failover facility on virtual and physical platforms that will allow automatic switchover in case of hardware failure.
- All of this criteria to be incorporated into the company's cloud platform hosted from its Dublin-based datacenters.

“Ultimately,” said Kelly, “we were seeking an Infrastructure-as-a-Service manageable solution rather than a managed server/service solution. We wanted to maintain control, but without the burden of set-up time and infrastructure. And we were looking for that at a time where that wasn't easily found during our initial search of providers.”

In fact, it was that element of control that served as the tipping point between the final vendor, Xterity, and all other prospective ones.

“As the leading global fitness education company we've always been at the forefront of development and innovation within our industry so we wanted our infrastructure to reflect the same values. Xterity was the complete package. We had a dashboard, a unique interface and Xterity was able to satisfy both our technology challenges as well as all of our essential criteria,” confirmed Kelly.

Solution and Savings

Consistent with its increasingly substantial online presence, FitPro decided that “the cloud” was an exceptional fit to both achieve and maintain its global leadership position within the educational fitness industry space.

“At the time of the RFQ through to today in 2015, we have increasingly moved a lot of our physical education online, including a lot of the courses we were running regionally that were also being moved to web-based solutions plus our recent upgrades to our accounting software and installing a CRM,” said Kelly. “We had reached a critical mass and didn't feel comfortable that we had the failover systems and processes in place required to reliably support a thriving online business with only internal servers doing all of the heavy lifting as well as the failover.”

As a result of partnering with Xterity for manageable cloud solutions, FitPro, leveraging Xterity's IaaS (Infrastructure as a Service) hosts its website as well as all of the company's business critical products including the aforementioned accounting, CRM and e-commerce services. Additionally, members of FitPro's web development team partner with the Xterity team on both remediating issues as well as opportunities to optimise their respective delivery systems.

“The business was growing, shifting and moving online. We needed near 100% uptime, scalability both up as well as downstream as our business needs changed. We wanted security, reliable failover and 99% uptime, all of which Xterity not only promised, but also delivered. And, to put a fine point on it, partnering with Xterity required no initial capital investment or CAPEX, which distinguished the company from all others we evaluated,” said Kelly.

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“FitPro’s tagline is ‘the world’s largest fitness development firm’. That’s who we are and what we do. We made the decision to go with Xterity because we want to partner with the best and the best want to partner with us. I feel that based on all of the benchmarks I’ve just described we’re the best at what we do and Xterity, clearly, has the best solution available in the manageable IaaS field.”

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That lack of needing to come up with initial capital outlay has served FitPro well based on the past four year profile Kelly recently developed to compare maintained onsite vs. hosted (servers) for the FitPro management team. As Kelly projects, FitPro has realised a cumulative 30% saving year over year by partnering with Xterity for cloud services rather than continuing to add, refresh and maintain its internal servers exclusively. And, significantly, the savings don’t end there.

“For example, as our CRM has grown we have the ability to add more RAM to the box,” said Kelly. “By adding on to the box we can improve its performance, which improves productivity and in turn enables sales to realise increased uptime, across more devices, which results in faster quotes and more sales.”

For Kelly Xterity has also proven itself as a manageable, rather than completely managed solution, the nuance enabling FitPro to continue its track record of phenomenal growth.

“At the time Xterity was very unique to the marketplace and in many ways they still are, but it speaks to the people behind the products, including those in technical support, that have largely and successfully contributed to its tenure and longevity with FitPro,” confirmed Kelly.

A Look Forward

When asked about how he sees FitPro evolving its relationship with Xterity into the future, it’s obvious the comfort level and the parallel paths of both companies are, by Kelly, always being considered.

“As our business grows and our requirements change we acknowledge, of course, there are a lot more offerings out there than there were when we first distributed our initial RFQ. However, we host all of our UK sites using the Xterity platform so we would like to see that capability persist and to see it continue well into the future,” said Kelly.

He added, “In fact, we’ve been impressed that as Xterity has grown they haven’t lost sight of the bigger picture. We have always felt we were an important client to them and their team and that fits in especially well within the ethos of a family-owned, entrepreneurial company like FitPro.”

Kelly also believes that shared trait of trying to endeavor to be the best at what you do, every day, reflects positively on both companies.

“FitPro’s tagline is ‘the world’s largest fitness development firm’. That’s who we are and what we do. We have the best education, the best resources, the best music, and so many versatile offerings for those involved in the fitness industry today,” said Kelly. “We made the decision to go with Xterity because we want to partner with the best and the best want to partner with us. I feel that based on all of the benchmarks I’ve just described we’re the best at what we do and Xterity, clearly, has the best solution available in the manageable IaaS field.”

For more information on the FitPro Group visit www.fitprona.com

About Xterity

Xterity was founded with the vision of bringing carrier-grade reliability and availability to the cloud. The Xterity infrastructure has been designed using the same philosophy that drives the rest of our business: combine best-in-class technologies with people who are highly motivated and dedicated to providing superior customer service.

High-availability is provided at both the virtualisation layer and hardware layer (using Egenera PAN Manager software) with physical hosts protected by Egenera PAN Manager’s N+1 DR capabilities.

Xterity delivers a set of cloud services that exceed the expectations of the most demanding customer at a price that is affordable by all. Today, organisations in finance, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, government and other business sectors rely on Xterity to support their computing needs. Contact us today to learn more.

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