

Case study

Woodall Nicholson Group



Migration to a fully Managed Service

KEY BENEFITS

- Access to heavyweight technical experts
- New disaster recovery plan
- Using Azure for our Active Directory
- Remote access to ERP

Woodall Nicholson Group is one of the oldest established coachbuilding companies in the UK. Headquartered in Westhoughton, Lancashire, the company can trace its history as far back as the 1820s, when it began building horse-drawn hansom cabs and carriages.

Almost 200 years on and Woodall Nicholson is flourishing with four business divisions across four locations in the North of England, building a huge range of vehicle types including buses, limousines, ambulances and hearses.

While growth has always been a goal, after an introduction of new management and investment in 2013, the rate of change has been unprecedented and turnover has more than doubled in five years.

IT Manager, Charles Sorry, takes up the story: "The change in management in 2013 affected the whole approach of the business, not just to IT but across the board. We suddenly had a team in place who were focussing on growing the business, increasing our market share, developing new products and investing in R&D and new models."

With such rapid business growth, reliance on IT systems, infrastructure and support grew accordingly.

Charles continues: "The new approach to the business was very exciting, but it meant that I was stretched and needed more resources to cope. We had to decide between employing more IT staff or outsourcing. I'd already been using Sentis Managed Solutions to help with back office support functions and the busier we got, the more I was relying on them to help, so we opted to use Sentis to fill that gap."

That relationship continued for several years and as the level of trust in Sentis' capabilities grew, so did the amount of work and complexity of projects delivered. Although everything was running smoothly, there was a significant fork in the road ahead, which was Charles' planned retirement in October 2017.



That left the business with a major decision to make; build an IT team in house or completely outsource to a Managed Service Provider.

For Charles, the latter was the obvious option. "Over the period of time we had been working with Sentis, we built up a really good relationship with the whole team. That gave me access to heavyweight technical experts, as well as a support team I had real confidence in. They also have considerable experience with SYSPRO, our ERP software. They know what infrastructure is required to make it function properly and that is a big consideration for us."

With Charles' mind made up, he took his recommendation to the board. Dan Jackson, Group Finance Director, explains.

"When Charles put Sentis forward, what really stood out was the level of work that they put in to understand our business in order to recommend appropriate solutions capable of growing with us. That helped me to build a level of trust in Sentis that they could deliver what they proposed."

"What I also liked is that they're the right size for our business. I didn't want to have an impersonal IT outsource services giant for whom we are just another tiny customer. I wanted to deal with someone who owned their own business, and who could demonstrate that they care about our business as much as they do their own."

With Sentis given the greenlight and a significant IT estate to consider, planning began in 2016 with a target takeover date of September 2017 firmly fixed.

From a technical perspective, Charles and Sentis took the opportunity to introduce some operational changes and upgrades. The MS Exchange server was ditched in favour of Office 365 allowing the machine count to be reduced, while the remaining servers were virtualised to improve performance and reliability.

KEY CLIENT FACTS

- Coachbuilding company
- Headquartered in Westhoughton, Lancashire
- Four locations in the North of England
- Established in the 1820s



Other changes included a backup and disaster recovery system that stores data at the Group's other facilities, in effect a private cloud arrangement. Remote desktop was also introduced at the other production facilities and for remote workers, improving security and consistency of approach across the Group.

Perhaps one of the most significant changes was shifting the existing Active Directory to Azure. A process which sounded easy in theory, but was many days in the planning to ensure the necessary policies were correct so everything would work in practice.

For Charles, that one element of the project reaped dividends. "Using Azure for our Active Directory means we can now use a single sign on which makes it much easier for users and when we have a new starter, it's a very simple process to get them set up with access to the software, files and systems they need."

With the reins now handed over to Sentis, Charles now acts as liaison between Woodall Nicholson and Sentis, but on much reduced hours. "I've not quite fully retired, but my role is much different to what it was. Sentis handle the vast majority - including early morning support tickets! - and I am on site a few hours a week to ensure things are working as they should."

For Dan, the move to a Managed Service Provider was a big decision but one he knows they got right. "We're not a business that is happy to stand still. We needed to make our systems fully appropriate for what we are today and future proof them so we can grow even further. Sentis understands that. Sentis is an entrepreneurial business, we're an entrepreneurial business. That fits well and is a key part of what makes the relationship work."

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About Sentis



At Sentis, we don't believe in 'standard IT'. We do believe that where IT plays a critical role in the operation of your business, then it's vital to make sure IT supports your business strategy.

That's why we work to really understand your business in order to help you get the most from the technology and people available. And because every business is different we understand that what works for one won't necessarily work for another.

Equally we know that most businesses simply want their IT to work, without getting too involved in the finer detail. So, we take the 'tech out of technology' by explaining things in simple terms and getting right to the benefits, without getting hung up on features.

We have a dedicated team of experts in the office and out on the road, offering helpline and on-site support to keep your business moving should your IT let you down. The whole team is totally committed to delivering excellent customer service, without baffling anyone with tech talk.



Our range of technical specialists includes:

- Technical Solutions Specialists
- Implementation Management
- Support Analysts
- Senior Consultants
- Data Centre Specialists
- Project Managers

As an independent company, we are not tied to any hardware or software vendors, so are always able to recommend exactly what is right for you. Our cloud based services are delivered via data centre locations in Leeds, Newbury and London.

Our individual approach, a broad range of technical expertise (in plain English) coupled with excellent customer service and no limitations on the technology we can offer makes Sentis a true partner.