



Case study

AAT Case Study

“Email is a communication tool that enables collaboration between colleagues, our Directors / Trustees and our membership. In itself, email adds no unique value to the AAT or the services we offer our members - but it is still critical in that it enables us to do our job.”

- Rob Smith, Virtual IT Director, AAT

AAT\ Customer Case Study

Executive Summary

The Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT), a professional body that offers qualifications for accounting technicians in the UK and internationally, has successfully outsourced its Microsoft Exchange email platform to SME managed service specialist Business Systems Group (BSG).

- Hosted Microsoft Exchange email for 135 - 150 employees
- Increased business continuity measures due to mirrored hosting site
- BSG offered higher business value / cost ratio than competitors
- Existing and legacy emails migrated to Microsoft Exchange environment

As Rob Smith comments: “As a not-for-profit membership organisation, value for money is one of the major issues we have to consider. However, it is vital that we make sound investments in quality services – something that we’ve definitely achieved by working with BSG”.

The Client

Established in 1980 to provide a recognised professional qualification and membership body for accounting technicians, the AAT is a worldwide, not-for-profit organisation with more than 100,000 members.



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“Through working with BSG, our ICT team can now focus on those areas of IT that add unique value to the organisation.”

- Rob Smith, Virtual IT Director, AAT

The Challenge

In 2005, the AAT experienced a minor disaster when an entire floor of its secondary office was put out of action due to a flood.

As Rob Smith explains: “The flooding wiped out a whole floor in our office, which made it completely unusable for several weeks. Thankfully we had enough room to house all the staff and equipment at our primary office until the other office was up and running again. However, this led us to consider what would happen if the same sort of thing happened at our main office.”

The AAT used the opportunity presented by the flooding to reassess its IT working practices, processes and equipment.

Rob continues: “It was not so much about business continuity, as we already had stringent business continuity plans in place, but was more concerned with increasing the reliability and efficiency of our infrastructure. BSG was already hosting a few of our servers and we wanted to investigate which what other options were open to us in terms of extending this third party management of our infrastructure.”

The AAT was also considering the possibility of an office relocation in the future and wanted to make this as ‘risk free’ as possible. Ultimately, the AAT was looking for a solution to simplify, derisk and improve its existing infrastructure.



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The Solution

The AAT's first port of call was BSG.

As Rob explains: "We approached BSG and explained what we were looking for. BSG came back to us with a detailed proposal tailored to meet the specific needs of the AAT."

The initial proposal from BSG suggested moving all of the AAT's servers offsite. After considering the proposal, the AAT realised that this might also be the ideal time to change its infrastructure altogether and fed this information back to BSG.

Rob continues: "After meeting with BSG to discuss our amended requirements in more depth, BSG came back to us with a new proposal incorporating the proposed management of our email systems. After further consultation with BSG, we also decided to move from Novell Groupwise to a Microsoft Exchange email solution."

BSG's proposal was to deliver reliable, mission-critical systems based on BSG hosting the AAT's Microsoft Exchange email for 150 users. Firstly, this involved migrating the AAT from Novell Groupwise to Exchange 2003 in a fully clustered exchange environment hosted from BSG's data centre – a tier 4 14 data centre which sits directly on a multi gigabit backbone. It is serviced by all the major UK telcos and includes all the security and features to be expected from a tier 4 14 data centre combined with BSG's own BS7799 Security accreditation.

BSG also set about arranging the archiving of AAT emails. By using Enterprise Vault archiving, BSG ensures that all AAT emails are constantly archived. Using this method allows emails still to be displayed in individual inboxes but keeps inboxes light by archiving the body of the email along with any attachments. This also provides an optimum level of email back up for the AAT.

As well as the archiving, BSG provided the means for secure web access to email for all AAT users, allowing access to email from any machine in any location. Combined with the ability to use mobile mail, this has allowed all AAT staff to be much more flexible than in the past.

All responsibility for operating this Exchange environment has passed to BSG via a single SLA of 99.5%. This equates to less than four hours per month of unscheduled downtime. Add to this BSG's guaranteed 24x7 technical support with a three hour response time and a UK based 24x7 help desk, and the scope of support provided by BSG is evident.

Rob comments: "After initial planning meetings, the project kicked off in August 2006. We had a dedicated BSG team who worked from wherever required (AAT's or BSG's offices). We first piloted the solution in the IT department as this seemed the most obvious place to start, followed by a finance department pilot in September / October time. Both pilots went extremely well and everything was up and running across the organisation by November."



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Why was BSG chosen?

The AAT had been working with BSG on a variety of projects for 15 years.

As Rob explains: “We knew that this project would involve taking a lot of our resources offsite and so it was vital that we could trust the IT partner completely. It made sense to go to BSG for this project due to our long term, successful relationship. BSG had already designed our internal infrastructure and so was ideally placed to move this offsite.”

However, as Rob states, it was not only the existing relationship that had encouraged the AAT to work with BSG: “As a not-for-profit membership organisation, value for money was one of the major issues we had to consider. However, it is vital that we make sound investments in quality services so the cost had to be weighed up against any potential business benefits. Compared to costs given by its competitors and the cost of managing the email exchange in in-house, the business value/cost ratio from BSG was much higher and therefore much more appealing.”

The AAT is very much convinced that it made the right decision when it chose BSG as its IT managed services partner.

As Rob explains: “We now have a truly collaborative IT business environment that’s that has given us true real efficiency gains throughout the organisation. Email is a communication tool that enables collaboration between colleagues, our Directors / Trustees and our membership. In itself, email adds no unique value to the AAT or the services we offer our members - but it is still critical in that it enables us to do our job. Through working with BSG, our ICT team can now focus on those areas of IT that do add unique value to the organisation.”

For further information contact:

info@bsg.co.uk | www.bsg.co.uk

Telephone 020 7880 8888