Cerberus Networks

Case Study
Hosted Lync 2013 for Hugo & Cat

Hugo & Cat

Hugo & Cat are a top 100 digital agency that provides a range of services including strategy, design, social marketing, mobile and web development and brand transformation. A big hitter for their size, their clients include Royal Mail, Tourism Ireland, Sony, IKEA, VW and Microsoft.

When Hugo & Cat needed to replace their phone system and conference calling service, Cerberus engaged with the client to fully assess their communication demands, both inside and outside the organisation.

With multiple locations and the need to collaborate internally and externally across multiple channels, Cerberus recommended Microsoft Lync 2013 as the right platform for Hugo & Cat to empower their staff and partners to communicate effectively.

Having confirmed the capabilities of the Lync system during a trial, Hugo & Cat asked Cerberus to design and build the solution around their requirements. The result was a solution that delivered integrated telephony, hosting, connectivity and security. Cerberus managed the commissioning of the new service as well as ongoing proactive management and support.

With extensive experience in IT, cloud, Internet and WAN services, Cerberus Networks has a unique insight when it comes to understanding the business needs of SME client and the demands of the technologies used to deliver these services.

Microsoft Lync 2013 provides a market-leading platform for businesses to collaborate and work more effectively than ever integrating presence, instant messaging, voice calling, video calling and public telephony.

Cerberus provides a suite of hosting and connectivity services specifically designed to enable these powerful and flexible communications technologies without the management and administrative overheads associated with running them in-house.

Solution Summary

MyCloud Computing providing 3 hosted virtual machines
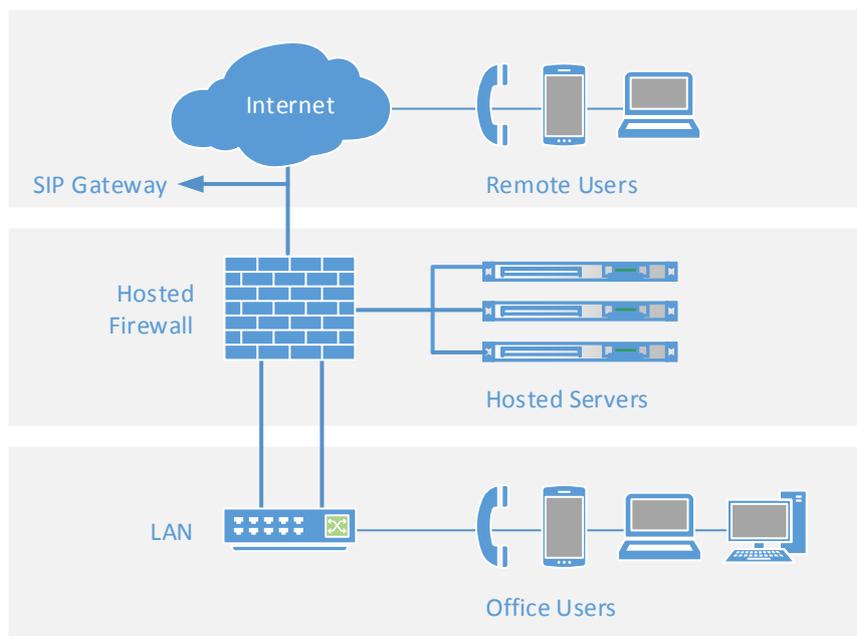
200Mbps Ethernet Leased Line

20Mbps Ethernet Leased Lines as active backup

Hosted Virtual Fortigate UTM firewall

Resilient SIP Trunks for public telephony

Microsoft Office 365 Enterprise E4 licenses

Microsoft SPLA Subscription Licenses for Software Assurance

Internet

SIP Gateway

Remote Users

Hosted Firewall

Hosted Servers

LAN

Office Users

Next Generation Telephony

Hugo & Cat's first priority was to replace their 8 year old analogue phone system. The company was moving offices and wanted to take the opportunity to upgrade some key infrastructure. Before going ahead with the Lync solution, Hugo & Cat wanted to be sure that a telephone system based on Lync would work for users. Technical Director, Gareth Osborne says:

"We knew that first and foremost, people would be comfortable using a system where some users would have handsets, but many would have softphones, and a lot of the ways they used the system would be very different from our traditional old Panasonic system."

After an initial demonstration followed by an extensive internal trial, Gareth and his colleagues were convinced that user adoption would be high.

"Despite a user interface that was new to us, our trial users quickly learned their way around the system with almost no training. We were really impressed with how easy it was to find and dial numbers. Things like conference calls that had required lots of special codes and putting people on hold while you got other users on the call became trivially easy – just a drag and drop into your call. It was a revelation!"

One of the other concerns that some in the business had had was over call quality. They had heard that IP-based telephony could have poor quality and drop-outs. Hugo & Cat found the opposite.

"We noticed straightaway that the call quality was really good for calls, especially internal ones. It is just like you are talking to a person sitting next to you."

Michael Rudge, Senior Consultant at Cerberus Networks, recalls,

"We were very confident in the voice quality from the Lync server. Cerberus has used Lync since 2010 and we have dedicated interconnects from our datacentres to our SIP provider. We know we can reliably deliver latency of 3 or 4 milliseconds from the Lync server to the SIP platform. That makes for reliably high quality call quality."

Many roles, one system

Once Gareth was convinced that Lync could deliver the telephony system that the company needed, it soon became clear that Lync was the perfect tool for many other requirements within the business. Gareth Osbourne remembers,

"Being able to use the system for video-conferencing with clients and running presentations was very attractive for us. We had previously used conferencing services and had found the quality a bit hit and miss, and the extra complexity of using an external system was always annoying and time consuming."

Added to which the system provided a great way for our teams to work together more easily in the office, and with colleagues overseas. While the creative teams would always like to work in the same space to share ideas, the Lync desktop client was a convenient way for them to have chats across the office and show each other visuals onscreen using the desktop sharing feature at the click of a button.

Hugo & Cat were keen to make sure that their new elegant and fully refurbished offices provided users with a modern, effective and versatile communications system.

When it came to planning the deployment, design was left to Cerberus' senior systems engineer Andy Ward. Ward designed a simple robust platform based on Cerberus' MyCloud Computing on-demand cloud infrastructure that fully integrated with the clients existing Active Directory domain and Exchange services. The system worked seamlessly alongside and part of the Office 365 cloud services.

Integration with Office 365

With Office 365 deployed throughout the company, it was essential for the Cerberus hosted Lync solution to work seamlessly with Exchange Online. In addition, Hugo & Cat was keen to license their Lync system in the most cost-effective way.

Michael Rudge recalls, that Microsoft's licensing policy caught up with the client's requirements at a convenient time.

"It was very cost effective to use the existing Lync licenses from Office 365; costing just a few pounds per user to move them to our platform and upgrade them to include full telephony. It was great for the client and made the whole system very affordable."

Simple and effective network design

Although the Lync system was running on Cerberus Networks' cloud computing platform, it had to be easily accessible from the client's office and also from remote locations when users were working elsewhere. Cerberus designed an intuitive wide area network to make this simple to use and effective..

Using a 200Mbps Ethernet connection with 20Mbps backup provided by Cerberus, Hugo & Cat already had resilient connectivity directly to two of Cerberus's datacentre hubs. This connectivity was then routed into a hosted virtual firewall using a resilient cluster of Fortinet Fortigate appliances at the primary datacentre. From here Cerberus provided Internet connectivity on one interface and also a layer-2 Ethernet connection from the firewall to the client's private network on the MyCloud Computing platform. Michael Rudge sums up the design,

"It's like having the Lync servers on a DMZ on your office firewall - except the firewall was the other end of a resilient Ethernet connection. As far as the traffic is concerned, the use of a cloud computing platform is irrelevant. These are just machines directly connected to an interface on the firewall. It makes security policy and traffic management much more straightforward."

Having the firewall in the cloud also meant that it could protect the Lync servers which faced the outside world for setting up calls over SIP, web conferencing and to allow remote users to connect.

One integrated solution

Although the design required several different interlocking parts, Cerberus was confident that they could deliver a very effective solution. Michael Rudge explains,

"Our strength lies in being able to combine multiple technologies to provide integrated solutions. I knew that we had all the components without having to outsource or compromise on the design. It was great to be able to combine our own connectivity, cloud computing, hosted security, licensing capabilities and systems build and management. Having control over everything meant that it came together really smoothly."

Gareth Osborne recalls,

"We were concerned that we would have to bring several suppliers in to make the solution work. In the end, we were able to keep the whole thing under one roof. This was really important for us as we wanted to be sure that we had one supplier responsible for getting the whole solution working. We also wanted to know that we had one supplier to go to if anything went wrong, and that they would be able to get it fixed without relying on third parties."

Versatile, effective and popular

In the 9 months since the company move, Hugo & Cat have come to rely on the hosted Lync solution from Cerberus. Gareth Osborne describes how his users now take the many capabilities of the system for granted:

"Most of our users were using handsets initially as they weren't convinced by the desktop and mobile client software. Now, nearly all the users who asked for handsets prefer to use a headset plugged into their laptop.

Tools like presence and IM have been completely ingrained into how we work now. We have been really pleased with how the system has worked for us. Users really like it."

For many companies this is the case. Michael Rudge recalls his experience.

"We sometimes find that clients are unsure about moving to a full Unified Communications platform from a traditional phone system. It can be a bit bewildering when you look at all the features in one go. But it really is amazing to see how quickly people understand and learn to make the most of Lync."

An effective and innovative partnership

When asked if he had any advice for people considering how similar companies should approach making a decision on their phone and communications platform, he offers some insight based on the experience that Hugo & Cat had,

"I would recommend that people take time to consider Lync when they get a new telephone system. Having our phones, chat and conference calling in one package has proved really effective for us. It has exceeded our expectations and the users love the new system."

On the subject of whether Cerberus provided the right solution for Hugo & Cat, Gareth Osborne is clear,

"Cerberus were really helpful with the planning and trialling of the system. They took time to work through our requirements and make sure that Lync would be right for us. And the delivery and roll-out of the whole solution went really smoothly from start to finish, right down to handling our number porting. We were up and running in our new office on our old phone numbers without any disruption.

They are always there to support us if we need any help. We're really glad we chose this solution and chose Cerberus to provide it for us."