

Newcastle Building Society

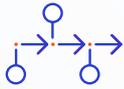
Rigorous vendor analysis and selection for accelerated digital transformation during challenging circumstances



Intelligent Workspace

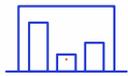


Secure Workplace



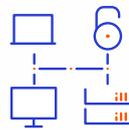
Forfusion's timeline

October 2018	----->	January 2019	----->	June 2019	----->	March 2020
01		02		03		04
Initial involvement		75 days' proof of concept project		Digital workspace project		COVID-19 response



NSSL Statistics

- Subsidiary of the NBS group
- 15 significant banking clients
- £20+ billion assets
- 2 data centres
- 32 branch offices
- 1200+ users
- Multi-vendor security environment
- Ageing PCs and laptops
- Windows 7 estate
- Limited remote working capability



Solution components deployed:

- Cisco HyperFlex (Hyperconverged)
- VMware ESXi Hypervisors (vCenter)
- Citrix Workspace (full-suite)
- Cisco 9000 series switches
- Cisco FTD firewalls
 - Cisco Identify Services Engine
 - Cisco AnyConnect VPN
- Cisco Identify Services Engine
- Citrix Workspace (full-suite)
 - IGEL thin clients

Background

Newcastle Strategic Solutions Ltd (NSSL) is a wholly owned fintech subsidiary of Newcastle Building Society. NSSL provides 'white-label' ICT services, systems development and on-going operational support to the Society and more than 15 significant national and international external banking clients with £20+ billion of assets under management.

Specialising in various web-based and mobile applications, along with robust back-office platforms, NSSL creates better ways of doing business for members, clients and customers, without compromising on the professional standards, resilience and assurance expected in the financial services sector.

Here, Steven Forrest, CEO of Forfusion, describes how they helped NSSL establish a future-proof hyperconverged and hybrid cloud platform that would catalyse their digital transformation during challenging times.

Legacy

"NSSL was operating a complex environment of bespoke applications on behalf of Newcastle Building Society," Steven explains.

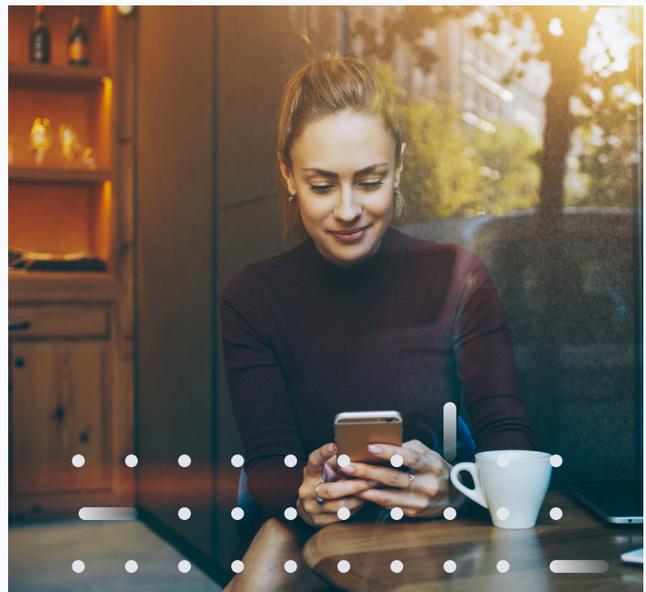
"This included multi-vendor security policies and a laptop and PC estate approaching obsolescence."

Problem

"The Building Society users were experiencing productivity and innovation constraints, along with limited capability for remote working," says Steven.

"Slow user logons, the imminent withdrawal of Microsoft support for Windows 7 and a disparate environment of on-premise applications, were all adding to the inflexibility, inefficiency, and cumbersome nature of the environment.

"Essentially, the entire estate was difficult to administer and did not align with NSSL's strategy to make communications seamless and secure."





Requirement

NSSL developed a sound commercial and financial justification for a fully integrated, multi-vendor, intelligent workspace solution that would meet budgetary requirements and provide a future-proof platform for digital transformation.

Steven explains: “In the first instance NSSL needed a partner to recommend a geographically dispersed hyperconverged infrastructure, and a hybrid cloud workspace vendor.

“They wanted to begin with a detailed market assessment followed by a Proof of Concept (PoC) that could migrate to full production capability and scale beyond 2000 users, spanning tens of geographical locations.”

The solution needed to meet the ever-changing needs of the workforce, where security, reliability and seamless collaboration between department teams and customers were paramount.

The end goal was to provide a fully integrated hybrid, on-premises and public cloud platform, which would be used as an enabler for remote workers, as well as improve operational efficiencies and reduce cost over time.



The COVID effect

When the pandemic hit mid project rollout, NSSL had to accelerate its digital transformation strategy to enable its staff to work from home.

Commenting on the approach, Geoff Hogg, NSSL’s Information Services Director, says: “We worked in unison with Forfusion to make the architectural changes necessary to deploy users remotely.

“A rollout originally planned to take several months was accelerated to meet demand, and the entire organisation, including a busy contact centre, moved to home working within days.”

Reliability, flexibility and ease of administration were tested under the most unpredictable and unrelenting of circumstances, allowing NSSL to leverage numerous disaster recovery scenarios to the fullest, serving its employees and customers, and meeting strict regulatory compliance.

Why Forfusion?

NSSL wanted to engage with a business and technology consulting partner that possessed relevant expertise in both vendor and market analysis, and that specialised in using rigorous qualification and disqualification processes to determine best fit solutions. They sought a partner to help align vendor propositions with their specific short-term and long-term requirements.

It was imperative that the chosen partner had extensive experience in presenting balanced and objective strategies, and that they could offer advice and recommendations relating to digital workspace tools and applications.

It was also vitally important the supplier understood the hyperconverged world, as this would serve as the bedrock on which the virtual desktop infrastructure workloads would sit.

Furthermore, the chosen supplier needed to have demonstrable experience designing, deploying and supporting end-to-end digital workspace solutions, with deep technical expertise across multiple technology pillars.

These included: data centre; networking; security; applications and virtual desktop; as well as how each would work in harmony to maximise ROI.



Solution Approach

Describing the approach Steven says: "From the outset, Forfusion worked closely with NSSL's technical and commercial teams to understand the primary operational, financial and technical business drivers.

"A team of engineers, consultants and strategists was engaged at project inception to ensure no stone was left unturned.

"Forfusion offered deep, relevant market and vendor analysis, multi-vendor design, quality assurance, project management and engineering, culminating in a coherent documentation set.

"We also facilitated early vendor engagement to mitigate ongoing project risk."



01 Access

To determine which vendor would best serve NSSL, and provide a robust solution that improved user experience, workforce mobilisation, environment stability, security and governance, it was necessary to undertake an extensive options review exercise.

A phased approach was taken, encompassing market research, and customer specific definition of requirements, both of which demanded the interpretation of data to derive definitive vendor and product recommendations.

In the words of Richard Henry, NSSL's IT Project Manager: "Forfusion de-risked the decision-making process from the outset.

"The market and vendor analysis Forfusion delivered were both objective and detailed, and completely aligned with our requirement to future-proof our journey to cloud."



02 Design

With risk mitigation, futureproofing and vendor best practice alignment front of mind, Forfusion created hyperconverged and digital workspace design documents, as well as the associated test and implementation plans.

NSSL's Infrastructure Services Manager, David Thane, comments: "Forfusion experts were able to advise us on securing our infrastructure, both in terms of our network and our mission critical applications.

"This meant we could begin transitioning away from products that were no longer a good fit, in favour of better security, visibility and ease of use."

As with all project documentation produced, each document type was verified via a combined NSSL and Forfusion Quality Assurance process to obtain sign-off.

Importantly, designs were also aligned with Cisco's Validated Design guides for deploying Citrix Virtual Applications on Cisco HyperFlex.



03
Integrate

Commenting on Forfusion's integration expertise NSSL's IT System Services Manager John Oliver says:

"Team Forfusion demonstrated a deep and diverse range of integration skills, encompassing Cisco networking and security, Citrix VDI and Workspace, VMware hypervisor, and Microsoft Office 365, as well as a strong understanding of interdependent technologies concerning Active Directory and Group Policy Objects."

The result is a seamless, secure end-to-end, multi-vendor digital workspace environment.



04
Operate

The working environment was changed dramatically due to working restrictions caused by COVID-19. NSSL needed to quickly migrate its user base from office locations to remote home working environments.

Forfusion's recommendation for NSSL to procure the all-encompassing Citrix digital workspace suite and invest in a geographically dispersed Cisco hyperconverged infrastructure provided the perfect platform for users to reliably access mission critical business systems and services.

Aside from the technology investment, Forfusion served as a dependable partner, often working through the night and assisting NSSL as and when required. A team of engineers, consultants, and strategists were on hand to ensure the transition went smoothly under such difficult circumstances.

Geoff Hogg says: "Forfusion went above and beyond in all aspects of the project and the handover to our internal support team was no exception.

"All documentation was comprehensive and clear and means we can take this solution on internally with minimal risk as we manage it moving forward."



Outcome and Benefits

Thanks to Forfusion's experience in designing, deploying and supporting multi-vendor hybrid digital workspace environments, NSSL is now benefitting from a robust, secure, cloud-ready and inherently flexible platform.

Secure remote working has been enabled for 1200+ users by selecting the correct vendors, designed and deployed in the right way for NSSL's business.

Policies and procedures have been streamlined to simplify administration, and training has been delivered to ensure the NSSL team is self-sufficient in preparation for ongoing change.

Commenting on the main ingredient for success Steven Forrest says: "Forfusion have been instrumental in forging trusted working relationships between NSSL, Citrix, Cisco and IGEL, ensuring the customer requirements were understood and the technical gaps were plugged."

New Possibilities

The end-to-end digital transformation solution can scale with NSSL's optimistic growth plans over the next five years, accommodating migration from on-premises, to hybrid, to public cloud services at a pace that suits both the Society and technology advancements.

The new platforms, tools and applications will also support decisions regarding office premises purchase and leasing. They will have a positive bearing on interdepartmental communications, employee wellbeing, and will create a robust, reliable and secure environment for NSSL's customers. Expressing his satisfaction, Geoff Hogg says:

"Partnering with a trusted, highly accredited and experienced systems integrator such as Forfusion provided the tools, applications and expertise to instil confidence in NSSL's technical team.

"We now feel fully equipped and well positioned for the future having deployed these important new technologies."

Geoff Hogg

Newcastle Strategic Solutions





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