



Flexibility and responsiveness are the keys to a new internet hosting service for SMBs

“I had never seen such an aggressive and pragmatic way of managing a project before. BT demonstrated a truly can-do collaborative attitude.”

Paul Farrington
Head of Development & Technology
Clearlybusiness

BT responded to needs expressed by Barclays Bank subsidiary Clearlybusiness and developed a Managed Hosting Service aimed squarely at small to medium businesses

Marketplace

Small-to-medium businesses (SMBs) form an important part of the UK economy, and all the major banks compete for their custom. Clearlybusiness is a wholly owned Barclays Bank subsidiary charged with providing innovative non-banking services to SMBs covering accounting, cash flow, inventory management, marketing, HR and legal services, via best-of-breed software packages. Paul Farrington, Head of Development & Technology at Clearlybusiness, explains: “The rationale is that by providing professional services to help SMBs run their companies more of them will be successful and their relationship with Barclays Bank will grow.”

Business opportunity

The Clearlybusiness web site was initially used as a mechanism to attract clients and sell software packages. However, over time the approach has changed. It is now the primary communication tool with the company’s nearly half-a-million clients and is considered an important factor in promoting best business practice and helping small business customers to be a success. Clearlybusiness estimates that a large proportion of its clients now access

the web site on a daily basis to review news items of interest to the SMB community such as changes in tax filing regulations or results of employee surveys.

Towards the end of 2005, Clearlybusiness saw that it needed a web site hosting service to meet the rising expectations of its customers. It also wanted to reduce its cost of ownership by moving to an Open Source environment using LINUX. Paul Farrington says: “We needed a flexible and bespoke hosting service. The chosen supplier would need to be not just responsive but competitive against other Tier 1 providers in the market.”

BT solution

Clearlybusiness talked to BT, who began by identifying the issues to be addressed. “I was impressed from day one by the ability of the Relationship Manager to identify our needs and relay these to the new BT account team,” comments Paul Farrington.

It was decided that BT would introduce a new service stream that would serve the internet demands of SMBs, offering a more bespoke approach. Alongside greater flexibility in choice of software infrastructure

Case study

Clearlybusiness

“Because of the reliability of the service it’s only when there are problems – and you see how your provider responds – that you can judge them. Since the new service started BT has always been very responsive to any issues we have faced and there have been no breaches of service level agreements. In other words it does what it says on the tin... and you can’t ask for more than that.”

Paul Farrington
Head of Development & Technology
Clearlybusiness

and a rapid change management and problem resolution capability, the new service would offer simpler and faster hardware upgrade capability. In addition, consultancy would also be available covering initial design through project management to implementation. By streamlining and focusing its service model BT was able to ensure that it could provide a high level and cost effective service for SMB clients.

Clearlybusiness accepted a proposal based upon that new service model: it met the company’s requirements, the proposed implementation timescale was short, and the costs were competitive. The first step was to relocate and upgrade the Clearlybusiness servers to the new BT Managed Hosting centre in Cardiff, where a team of experienced staff had been assembled to provide the new service.

Offices worldwide

The services described in this publication are subject to availability and may be modified from time to time. Services and equipment are provided subject to British Telecommunications plc’s respective standard conditions of contract. Nothing in this publication forms any part of any contract.

© British Telecommunications plc 2007.
Registered office: 81 Newgate Street, London EC1A 7AJ
Registered in England No: 1800000



In line with the new bespoke approach, BT undertook to install a LINUX operating system for Clearlybusiness so that it could use Open Source content management software to reduce cost of ownership. In addition, Clearlybusiness was given direct access to a help desk so that any change management requests or problems could be progressed directly with the responsible area.

After signing a contract in mid-December 2005, Clearlybusiness was able to launch a completely new web site running on the LINUX server in January 2006. Paul Farrington says: “I had never seen such an aggressive and pragmatic way of managing a project before. BT demonstrated a truly can-do collaborative attitude.”

The new service provides complete operational functionality including:

- Industrial strength hosting centre
- Tier 1 ISP multi-pathed internet connectivity
- Cisco Powered Network
- Robust monitoring and management services and systems, with automatic escalation of service issues
- Comprehensive management services including operating system management, backups and capacity management
- State-of-the art security

During the project, BT helped Clearlybusiness to implement its Open Source content management tool as well as providing overall project co-ordination and designing, ordering, building and installing the web server environments. “BT’s ability to set a realistic but challenging deadline for going live, identify key dependencies across BT and Clearlybusiness, assign tasks, and produce a quality plan to prove the service fit for purpose was outstanding,” recalls Paul Farrington.

Results

Clearlybusiness now has a stable and secure platform with excellent performance for users and a site that that can respond quickly to changing needs in either content or infrastructure. Clearlybusiness has continuous access to the servers to change content and update applications, while system changes are handled efficiently through the new change management process under which small changes are usually implemented the same day. Overall cost of ownership has gone down through the elimination of licence costs by using Open Source software. In addition, the reduced complexity of the new environment has lowered maintenance requirements. A streamlined BT business model that provides Clearlybusiness with very competitive rates has further contained costs.

Clearlybusiness feels that the new BT service group has the operational ethos of a small company, looking to give fast client responses whether it is for problem resolution or designing new projects. Paul Farrington says: “With this new service BT is not only the dynamic business partner that Clearlybusiness needs but we believe it is also providing the flexible service demanded by the broad SMB market.”

Originally implemented as a one-year trial, Clearlybusiness was happy to extend this to a three-year contract based upon performance and competitive pricing. Paul Farrington concludes: “Because of the reliability of the service it’s only when there are problems – and you see how your provider responds – that you can judge them. Since the service started, BT has always been very responsive to any issues we have faced and there have been no breaches of service level agreements. In other words it does what it says on the tin... and you can’t ask for more than that.”

Main BT products and services

- BT Managed Hosting Service
- BT web and internet services