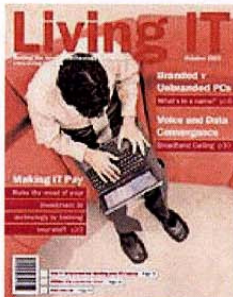




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**The virtual IT manager**

Based in Leicester Square, at the heart of London's theatre-land, Encore Tickets is a small but fast-growing ticketing wholesaler but the company's success and speedy growth has presented some challenges.



Encore has its own reservation system, however a large number of bookings are made via email. Director of Marketing at Encore Tickets, Sean Sweeney explains, "We are a service business and as such the repeat business we receive is as a direct result of our clients' experience in booking with us. We need to be 100% confident that every prospective email booking reaches us in a timely fashion."

"We have a simple IT requirement, but it is vital to the success of our business that we are up and running 24/7. With our previous system, we were constantly experiencing IT problems from major email disruptions to total system crashes."

As a small, growing company it was not realistic for Encore to employ an in-house IT person. "In addition to the cost implications it was recognised that a member of staff would have holidays and occasional sick days and if the system went down during this time we would be unable to provide adequate cover," explains Sweeney.

The solution was to outsource the management of its IT function to an established consultancy or reseller. As Sweeney says: "When you are placing such a critical element of your day-to-day business in the hands of someone else you need to be sure you chose wisely", so Encore was careful in making its choice. It chose a company called Ramsac to provide its IT services. "We felt comfortable that they understood our concerns and the strategic role that IT played in the success of our business. We were also reassured by a personal recommendation from our accountancy firm", says Sweeney.

The first task for Ramsac was to stabilise Encore's network to stop the regular system crashes that had been occurring. Many of the PCs were operating on different versions of Microsoft Windows and needed to be standardised to run on the same software. A server was in place but staff were saving important documents locally. Also, the organisation was running Exchange Server, but staff were again storing email locally in Outlook Express.

As the email mountain continued to build it would reach the 2GB limit and the PC would crash, leaving the member of staff unable to access email, often losing important messages and unable to access all other documents stored on the PC.

A new server was specified and installed and Exchange correctly configured to ensure that the storage of all documents and email was centralised, freeing up hard-disk space and therefore reducing the frequency of system failures. Ramsac also spotted that the cost of communications could be cut by making use of an available leased line.

Once the network was stabilised and business processes streamlined a package of both on-and-off site service and support was agreed and Encore now receives a monthly site visit from a 'virtual' IT manager who troubleshoots any problems, offers advice and discusses plans for ongoing IT requirements.

Sweeney says this way of managing IT works well for Encore "We can now rely on our IT network and the applications it hosts. If a problem arises we know that help is immediately available to keep us up and running."

The pricing structure that Ramsac has set up also works well for Encore. "Before we were continuously fire-fighting our IT issues and could not effectively budget our expenditure. Ramsac bills a monthly fee, which we can factor into our yearly budget, enabling us to implement strategic IT planning for the first time and at the fraction of the cost of employing a full time IT manager."