

PARCEL COUNTRY CASE STUDY

Hosted Desktops and Exchange



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When Robert McCarthy and John Walker – both former John Lewis senior executives with significant expertise in online sales and customer service – decided to start up a new company, certain values were key. By providing a secure and convenient service that is also simple and inexpensive, their aim is to revolutionise the home delivery component of online shopping. Already well aware of the benefits of outsourcing IT operations, such as the freedom, cost efficiency and speed of implementation it affords, they selected ThinkGrid to provide, support and manage the infrastructure they needed to get up and running.

Whilst it offers a quick and easy alternative to trawling the high street, the recent boom in online shopping is not without its obstacles. Problems with home deliveries will affect a huge number of people who purchase goods online this year, but the imaginative solution presented by Parcel Country aims to change all of that.

Robert McCarthy, co-founder and partner in the new venture, explains: “The underlying concept of Parcel Country is based on research indicating that shoppers won't travel far to pick up goods, and don't want to pay significantly more for deliveries. In 2008, an estimated 596m parcels will be delivered to 22m online shoppers, but home delivery is problematic for 40% of them and a further 28% of shoppers say that delivery concerns have prevented them from shopping online.” Home delivery problems are also a major cause of customer dissatisfaction, with even best-in-class retailers seeing 1 in 5 shoppers dissatisfied with one or more aspects of their most recent delivery.

Through the company's website (www.parcelcountry.com), online shoppers can arrange to have their purchases delivered to local parcel receivers – known as Community Recipients – for collection at a mutually convenient time. Typical examples of Community Recipients might be small businesses like corner shops, but could also include private individuals such as home workers, people looking after children at home, or retired people. Parcel Country is launching in Hertfordshire in autumn 2008 and is aiming to have 360 Community Recipients in place by then, with this figure expected to grow to around 30,000 very rapidly.

Robert continues: “All of our business will be conducted through the website, so a reliable presence is essential. Participants will be able to sign up online to become a Recipient, and users will pay online. Recipients check a confirmation box on the site when goods arrive, triggering an automatic email alert to the customer. The website includes a consumer rating system to give other would-be users a picture of each recipient's reliability and performance. When the system gathers momentum, retailers will be encouraged to integrate it into their own web sites, allowing users to select their drop-off location and pay during the checkout process.

“We needed to set something up within a very tight time frame, with the capability to grow extremely quickly if necessary. When we reach 30,000 recipients there will be a recipient within five minutes of 95 per cent of the UK population, so we're talking about a high-density system. In order to do this, we needed the usual IT infrastructure - desktops, web hosting, email etc. – but we needed it fast, and it had to be reliable, cost-effective and flexible. As a relatively small start-up company, it made sense for us to hand the IT management over to **a trusted partner** to leave us free to concentrate on building the business.

“Guaranteed up-time is crucial for us, so this was obviously a major consideration when it came to choosing a hosting company. With ThinkGrid, however, there are a number of other services they provide that are helping us get the business off the ground with the minimum of fuss. By using **hosted desktops**, we don't have to



purchase, maintain and upgrade traditional desktop PCs – instead we access all of the software and data via a secure internet connection. This solution provides us with everything we would normally have access to on an office network but without the costs, hassle and risks of installing and maintaining the hardware and software needed to provide these services. Set-up was almost instantaneous, so we were able to start work right away, and we can easily add additional power, storage, features and functionality as we need them.

“For added convenience, we also chose to take advantage of **ThinkGrid’s BlackBerry wireless solution**. This allows our employees to access calendars, receive meeting requests and other messages wherever they are, as well as building a single mailbox for all messages, both wireless and landline. In terms of technical support, the level of service we enjoy with ThinkGrid is first rate. Our own dedicated team of IT experts are available 24/7, and we’ve found them to be extremely responsive and helpful.”

Rob Lovell, CEO for ThinkGrid, comments: “Having acquired extensive knowledge and experience of providing top-level hosted IT services over the years, we’ve developed an innovative resource that allows us to help coordinate and manage Parcel Country’s needs in a fully scalable way. As their business grows, the services we provide will grow with them. One of our greatest strengths is that we are capable of catering for a wide variety of requirements, providing a **genuinely bespoke IT solution rather than ‘one size fits all’**. Customers can pick and choose the services they need, and only pay for the resources they actually use. This is particularly helpful for start-up companies and SMEs, as it greatly reduces the burden of IT costs, which can present a considerable up-front investment as well as an on-going expense. As Parcel Country expands, we look forward to helping to facilitate that growth.”

About Parcelcountry

Parcel Country will revolutionise online shopping by solving the conundrum of shopping from home: easy to order, hard to deliver. With a network of Community Recipients - local people and local businesses able to take in your parcels - you can order online knowing that you won't have to wait in all day for your delivery, or make a long drive to a carrier depot. Once delivered to the Community Recipient, you can pick up your parcel just down the road at a time convenient to both of you.

About ThinkGrid

ThinkGrid provides business IT on demand. We take away the management and cost burden of owning your own IT by offering it to you as an on demand service. No longer do you need to make huge capital investments in PCs, servers, software and telephony systems. Instead, with ThinkGrid each employee is given their own personalised hosted desktop that can be accessed from anywhere in the world through an Internet connection. Applications can be added and removed at the touch of a button and hosted telephony systems can also be provided. You only pay for what you use and can scale up and down at the click of a mouse based on business need.