Joseph Chamberlain College Dramatically Improves End User Experience and Infrastructure Agility with Nutanix

Customer Background
Founded in 1983, Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College is a top-performing College in Birmingham, United Kingdom. Achieving an A-level pass rate of 97% in 2013, JCC is the only sixth form college in the UK to have won the prestigious Queen’s Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education.

Complex and Aging Infrastructure Hinders Performance
With a student body of 1,600-1,700 full-time students, JCC maintains a reputation as a state of the art, innovative sixth form college. A large part of JCC’s ability to attract students revolves around the school’s innovative, technology-focused campus and core curriculum. The school remains competitive by providing a high quality end user experience and efficient support for students and faculty.

According to Purdip Bahra, IT Manager at JCC, the complex SAN and blade infrastructure was aging and had begun to impact performance for end users and was demanding more effort from the IT staff. “One of the technical challenges was we had quite a complex infrastructure. We had a Cisco network, HP blade enclosures with blade servers and a separate EMC SAN. So, you need to have very good knowledge of storage, iSCSI and sometimes EMC SAN is not the easiest piece of technical kit to work with. The infrastructure was now close to 4-5 years old so it was a natural time for us to refresh and replenish the IT estate.”

Beginning to research new solutions and highlighting the goal of finding a simple, easy to manage infrastructure, Purdip noted, “We have somewhere in the region of 800 student-facing devices and around 250 to 300 teacher-facing devices. We’re a small team with a large estate to manage in terms of technology and infrastructure. This was one of the primary reasons we wanted something that was very easy to manage, very powerful and also very versatile.”

A Complete Scalable Solution for Private Cloud Infrastructure

Coming across a Nutanix webinar, Purdip quickly saw the value of Nutanix’s technology and approach, and reached out to the Nutanix team to discuss the Virtual Computing Platform in-depth.

Through some simple testing and sizing exercises with the Nutanix team, Purdip saw how easily Nutanix handled the high stress of its server workloads. “We looked at performance on some of our key SQL systems and our Exchange environment. It was quite apparent that it’s far easier to provision storage and manage virtual machines with Nutanix.” Purdip continues, “It was very clear that the company was thinking about their customer use cases and making sure that the technology and their product met the needs of their customers and, ultimately, the end users.”

Eventually deciding to move forward with Nutanix as the chosen infrastructure for the school’s entire datacenter, Purdip confirms that his team now runs every mission critical workload on their NX-3000 platform.

“My key requirements were to have something that was simple, easy to manage, and ideally a single pane of glass. I wanted a solution that was very powerful and also very versatile. For me, Nutanix ticked all of those boxes.”

- Purdip Bahra, IT Manager, Joseph Chamberlain College
Lightning-Fast Performance and Simple Management for SQL and Exchange Workloads

Thus far, the Nutanix Virtual Computing Platform has continued to deliver on the promise of simple manageability and fast performance. With Nutanix, the JCC IT Services team has reduced the amount of time needed to support the high demands of its SQL and Exchange environments by condensing all of the school’s 32 server VMs onto a single, scalable platform.

Concurrently running an Exchange environment of 3,000 users, several large SQL and MySQL applications, all file servers and hosting all user data, the Nutanix block has exceeded expectations under heavy stress. While the end user experience with Nutanix has improved dramatically, Purdip and his team are now more efficient and proactive with this system in place.

Purdip described, “One of the benefits was that this single platform could quite happily cope with two very different workloads – both of which have very high input/output activity. At any one time you could have all of our students and staff updating information on this SQL server-based system. Exchange is also used very heavily by our staff and students. If email ever went down, this would have quite an impact on staff and students, so it’s a very key IT service and Nutanix runs it incredibly well, without any hitches. We have even seen significant improvement in log-on times for our Exchange users.”

From Pain Point to Competitive Advantage

Describing how simple it is to provision VMs with Nutanix, Purdip explains, “If someone turns around and says they need a new web server, I can go into VMware on Nutanix, right-click, and create a new virtual machine in less than 5 seconds. Traditionally, this could take up-to 5 minutes, which becomes a significant operational overhead given that we frequently add new VMs to support onboarding new users. In terms of business benefits, Nutanix can definitely make an IT department very powerful.”

Purdip and his team have also noticed a significant increase in the amount of positive feedback from students and faculty. “With Nutanix, our reputation internally in the college as a support department has become very positive. We have received comments like ‘the response time from the IT team has been fantastic.’”

Additionally, with Nutanix’s drastically lower power consumption figures, the college has received good credibility for green credentials, replacing about 20U of infrastructure with just 2U of the Nutanix platform.

Commenting on how quick and efficient the Nutanix support team has been thus far, Purdip notes, “I find the support to be very, very professional, very quick and efficient and obviously very, very knowledgeable in their area. I’d give them a ten out of ten.”

For Joseph Chamberlain College, Nutanix is the Future

Nutanix has exceeded expectations at JCC. Purdip reiterates that if the college plans to trial VDI in the future, Nutanix will be his first choice. “Nutanix is an absolutely brilliant piece of technology for trialing VDI as well.” The team is also very impressed with the hypervisor agnostic approach of Nutanix and the plan is to evaluate Hyper-V on Nutanix for supporting additional workloads in the future.