Honan Insurance Group: Honing in on our Partners: blueAPACHE - blueAPACHE

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2020 challenged business systems and technologies like never before, forcing many organisations to adopt remote working arrangements at scale, almost overnight. We are more than a leading technology and communication service provider; our solutions enable business growth, innovation and facilitate customer and employee engagement. As trusted advisors, we partner with many businesses to fast-track their digital strategies in a safe and sustainable way – including Honan. As 2021 begins, we spoke with Michael Zuppa, General Manager – Technology about the key learnings from last year, and noteworthy trends on the horizon.

THE CRUX OF YOUR BUSINESS?

We are based on the idea that people should have secure and efficient access to their systems wherever they are, all of the time. This enables our clients to achieve success, be agile and dynamic to support their own client communities.

2020 SAW A DRAMATIC SHIFT TO REMOTE WORKING AND we were INSTRUMENTAL IN HELPING MANY BUSINESSES MAKE THAT MOVE. WHAT WERE YOUR BIGGEST LEARNINGS FROM THE YEAR?

As organisations were forced to adopt a remote working model, the swift transformation emphasised two key misconceptions: Firstly, that implementing such dramatic organisational change is difficult and time consuming. COVID-19 has not only set a “new normal” when it comes to traditional workplaces, it has also set a new normal in terms of what is achievable in a short timeframe. Historically, a project might have had a 6-month deployment timetable, but COVID has expedited this, demonstrating a new application can be deployed and value realised in days or weeks, not months. Secondly, from an operational perspective, many organisations incorrectly assumed that their people could not be as productive and effective when granted access to the tools to work remotely. The amazing response to the pandemic has clearly proven this wrong which will require some organisations to change their attitudes towards flexible work arrangements – it is now clear, when you give people the right tools for the job, they rise to the occasion.

The value of network connectivity was realised during lockdowns with the NBN retail network placed under considerable strain. Whilst it worked for many, there were instances where it was not sufficient. With agility top of mind, we responded to our clients’ immediate needs, designing a bespoke data and device rental solution ‘Connectivity in a Box’ which provided flexibility and cost reduction from a pay-per-month model. This reinforced the importance of home connections for employee collaboration and productivity in this new remote-working norm.

Organisations that were already harnessing a consumption-based, flexible application delivery supply chain model were positioned strongly to transition to the new way of working and experienced the greatest time-to-value. The traditional capital expenditure (CAPEX) hardware stacks however saw challenges expanding beyond their original intent, and thus in some cases, had to be replaced altogether.

Work is no longer a place we go to, it is a thing we do and should be able to do from anywhere, on any device, with a consistent and secure user experience.

AT HONAN, MAINTAINING QUALITY CONNECTIONS WITH OUR PEOPLE, PARTNERS AND THE COMMUNITY SITS AT THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO. WHAT RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS WERE CRITICAL TO YOUR BUSINESS SUCCESS IN 2020?

As we descended into the COVID world of remote working, maintaining our #teamblue community culture across staff, clients and suppliers was the top priority.

To counteract these workplace changes, we moved the traditional monthly townhall to weekly occurrences, and delivered these via TEAMS. The virtual speakerphone was used as an opportunity to connect with staff, providing an update on fluid changes to ease any COVID related angst whilst offering staff a platform to celebrate their peers with “shout outs” openly calling out a colleague who had gone above and beyond over the course of the week. Furthermore, department heads were encouraged to host daily stand ups to connect the team as a collective group, outside of 1-1 meetings.

We were extremely fortunate to continue our growth trajectory in 2020 with technology deemed instrumental in our “new world”, subsequently leading to us welcoming new members of staff, globally.

Delivering a consistent induction experience for these new members was critical to ensure they felt part of the blueAPACHE community and were well equipped to deliver in their role irrespective of the 2-dimensional restrictions.

Relationships with our distributors and suppliers continued to be critical – working with them through their change process and understanding any supply impact due to international restrictions. This positioned blueAPACHE strongly to fast-track communications back to our clients and implement contingency plans if required.

DATA SECURITY, PRIVACY AND COMPLIANCE WERE TOPICAL ISSUES IN 2020, AS MANY BUSINESSES RUSHED TO DEPLOY REMOTE-WORKING CAPABILITIES. WHAT LESSONS CAN BUSINESSES TAKE FROM THIS?

PEOPLE, PROCESS AND TECHNOLOGY: When it comes to security there always needs to be a balance between people, process, and technology. The shift to remote working does not change an organisation’s obligation to adhere to industry compliance standards and regulations. Employees will be relying on the employer to provide guidance on how they should be working from home, and as the employees’ home inadvertently became the 2020 office, home networks were typically far less secure with printers and wireless devices connected, triggering vulnerabilities. Clear and concise policies, procedures, and guidelines along with awareness training goes a long way!

POLICY REVIEW: In order help protect sensitive data, organisations should be reviewing their data classification policies and toolsets.

ASD ESSENTIAL 8: At a minimum, it is highly recommended organisations align with the Australian Cyber Security Centre Essential 8 strategies to assist in protecting systems against a range of adversaries – in particular, multifactor authentication should be mandatory.

THE EVENTS OF 2020 DEMONSTRATED THE POSSIBILITIES OF REMOTE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND CHALLENGED SOME ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PRODUCTIVITY/EFFICIENCY. WHAT TIPS DO YOU HAVE FOR ORGANISATIONS ON HOW TO BEST FACILITATE A MIX OF ON-SITE AND REMOTE WORKING?

Equip employees with the right tools to be effective and productive when working from the office or home.

Portable devices support the seamless mobility between locations.

Standardisation of device enables higher adoption of flexible workspaces and hot desking.

Try having team members working out of the office on the same day.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST TECH TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS BUSINESSES SHOULD BE AWARE OF FOR 2021 AND BEYOND ?

It is all about SASE – Secure Access Services Edge. SASE is the convergence of wide area networking, or WAN, and network security services like CASB, FWaaS and Zero Trust , into a single, cloud-delivered service model. With remote working being the norm, and workloads transitioning to cloud at an increasing pace, the traditional approach of data centre firewalls backhauling traffic and remote VPN users no longer suffice, especially with the high adoption rate of unified communication and collaboration platform such as – TEAMS, ZOOM and Cisco Webex.

Workspaces and Zero Trust Identity access are a complementary trend that is gaining high attention. This is around single sign on (SSO) and multifactor authentication (MFA) access into all corporate systems and data with access being contextualised based on the location and the device that the user is connecting from.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST EXCITED ABOUT FOR THE BUSINESS OVER THE NEXT 6-12 MONTHS ?

2020 saw significant investment across both our core network and cloud hosting platforms . The new infrastructure will enable us to solidify our market-leading offerings into the mid-to-sub enterprise market.

These projects are in full swing and I am excited to see the successful completion of these transformational ventures so our existing and new customers can realise the value and benefits of this investment.

TECHNOLOGY MOVES AT SUCH A FAST PACE! WHAT INITIAL STEPS WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO SOMEONE LOOKING TO UPGRADE THEIR INFRASTRUCTURE, BUT FEELING OVERWHELMED ABOUT THE STATE OF THEIR BUSINESS' SYSTEMS?

Focus on the business outcomes and desired end state.

Majority of vendor line of business applications are transitioning to SaaS or PaaS.

Ensure the future state infrastructure is consumption based and can scale in line with business revenues. Agility to expand is paramount in order to take advantage of business opportunities and provide the flexibility to retract when needed.

Security, Governance and Compliance should be at heart of the service.

Work with a trusted partner like blueAPACHE who can guide and assist you through the entire application delivery supply chain, forming the right end user – network – private cloud / public cloud – security – governance and compliance composition to suit your unique requirements. Point solution providers will use the same hammer for every nail.

Hybrid cloud is the new norm – right workload, right cloud.

Who was interviewed for this blueAPACHE article and what is their role?

Michael Zuppa, General Manager – Technology within our business, was interviewed about our key learnings from 2020 and noteworthy technology trends on the horizon.

What is your core business philosophy ?

We are based on the idea that people should have secure and efficient access to their systems wherever they are, all of the time, enabling clients to achieve success and be agile and dynamic in supporting their own client communities.

What was 'Connectivity in a Box' and why did blueAPACHE create it?

'Connectivity in a Box' was a bespoke data and device rental solution designed by us in response to the strain placed on the NBN retail network during COVID-19 lockdowns. It provided flexibility and cost reduction through a pay-per-month model to reinforce home connections for employee collaboration

and productivity.

What two misconceptions about remote working did 2020 disprove, according to you?

First, that implementing dramatic organisational change like remote working is difficult and time-consuming — COVID-19 showed value could be realised in days or weeks instead of the typical 6-month deployment timetable. Second, that people could not be as productive and effective when given remote access tools — the pandemic response proved this wrong, showing people rise to the occasion when given the right tools.

How did you maintain its company culture during the shift to remote working in 2020?

We moved our traditional monthly townhall to weekly occurrences delivered via TEAMS, used the sessions to update staff and let colleagues give 'shout outs' to peers who went above and beyond, and encouraged department heads to host daily stand-ups to connect teams outside of 1-1 meetings.

What three lessons do you highlight regarding data security and compliance during the shift to remote working?

The three lessons are: (1) People, Process and Technology — organisations must maintain compliance obligations and provide clear policies, procedures and awareness training since home networks are typically less secure; (2) Policy Review — organisations should review data classification policies and toolsets to protect sensitive data; (3) ASD Essential 8 — organisations should align with the Australian Cyber Security Centre's Essential 8 strategies, with multifactor authentication being mandatory at minimum.

What is SASE and why do you consider it a key trend for 2021 and beyond?

SASE (Secure Access Services Edge) is the convergence of wide area networking (WAN) and network security services like CASB, FWaaS and Zero Trust into a single, cloud-delivered service model. We consider it key because traditional data centre firewalls and remote VPNs no longer suffice given remote working norms, increasing cloud workload migration, and high adoption of platforms like TEAMS, ZOOM and Cisco Webex.

What infrastructure investments did you make in 2020, and what was their purpose?

We made significant investment across both its core network and cloud hosting platforms in 2020. This new infrastructure was intended to solidify our market-leading offerings into the mid-to-sub enterprise market.

What advice do you give to organisations feeling overwhelmed about upgrading their IT infrastructure?

We advise focusing on business outcomes and desired end state, noting that most vendor line-of-business applications are transitioning to SaaS or PaaS. Organisations should ensure future infrastructure is consumption-based and scalable with business revenues, prioritize security, governance and compliance, work with a trusted partner like blueAPACHE who can guide the entire

application delivery supply chain, and adopt hybrid cloud as the new norm — matching the right workload to the right cloud.