



GCC innova solution delivers business growth with a return on investment in under six months at Chamberlains Nursery

Synopsis

Chamberlains Nurseries was under pressure from a key customer to provide electronic order transaction capability. In order to deliver this, and other system benefits, the GCC innova IT system upgrade included hardware, software and Sage 200 customisation elements all integrated into a single source solution.

Since completion the business has not only retained its key customer and seen business volumes grow, but has achieved a project ROI of less than six months.



"I am absolutely delighted with the IT solution delivered by GCC innova. The system has delivered significant business process improvements, ensured retention of a key customer and achieved to ROI of less than six months."

Richard Chamberlain

Managing Director, Chamberlains Nurseries

The Background

Chamberlains is a commercial nursery with a customer base which includes large national retailers. In keeping with many suppliers to the retail sector, the company was under increasing pressure to provide electronic ordering capability to one of its key customers. Also, due to continued sales growth, the business had reached a point where the number of transactions would soon require a process review and additional resources. In addition, the company was running multiple application software platforms which were not fully integrated eg Sage Line 50 for financial management and third party software for stock control. With the business continuing to expand, and the need to integrate a second remote site plus provide improve data visibility, Chamberlains urgently needed a review of its IT systems and processes.

Why use a standard middleware development platform?

GCC innova recommend a standard packaged middleware software platform where appropriate. This is configured to provide integration between the standard Sage application and third party systems. Standardisation is a cost effective way to improve software resilience and functionality. This functionality includes:

Automation

Capability to automate standard processes such as generating reports, responding to queries or executing workflow. The process can be event, e-mail or SMS triggered. Alternatively it may be a scheduled activity.

Integration

Two way synchronisation of data via FTP / email / SMS / XML / web site / Microsoft Office platforms. Data can also be reformatted and verified.

Alerting

Automatic notification to users and / or initiating activity when pre-defined business criteria have been reached. This reduces delays normally associated with human intervention eg stock level changes / re-ordering.

The Solution

Following a full needs analysis and process review, GCC innova recommended and implemented a complete solution based upon a hardware upgrade and software changes.

Completed in two stages, highlights of the IT project include:-

■ Fully automated, electronic order entry system

The system was initially upgraded to Sage 200 v5 and customised to increase transaction capacity, integrate stock management over multiple locations and facilitate process automation. A bespoke software interface was then written and implemented to complete the automated order transaction capability.

■ New SQL server for improved speed

A new SQL server for the Sage application was supplied and installed to optimise data handling speeds.

■ Enhanced system interrogation and management

A number of applications and upgrades were installed to improve reporting and application usage, including:-

- Sage 200 2009 - utilises the latest workspace features to improve single screen data visibility.
- SQL Reporting Services - produces enhanced reports for clearer, comprehensive and dynamic analysis of management / customer information.
- 'Business Alerts' - Sage event triggered software sends out alerts automatically (eg order verification for valid stock and customer accounts) to improve customer service / business warnings.
- Remote interrogation solution - allows Sage to automatically answer questions by e-mail or SMS without human intervention.

■ Complete IT system responsibility

GCC innova provided both the Sage business software solution and the network infrastructure platform. This ensured a single contact point during the design and installation and a single source responsibility for support thereafter.

The Benefits

■ Significant cost saving / efficiency improvements

Chamberlains can now process 1000 orders (SOP) per month and complete all financial / commercial ledger workload with a finance department of two staff. Improved server and network speed, combined with fast screens and reporting, improves efficiency and morale whilst decreasing stress and frustration.

■ ROI – payback less than six months

IT and process efficiency has negated the need for additional staff whilst processing more orders, with much higher levels of accuracy.

■ Large company capability

Chamberlains, a small regional grower, now has the IT capability of a much larger company. This allows the business to transact electronically with one of the UK's largest retailers, not only retaining the business but supporting growth.

■ Improved customer service levels

High levels of order processing accuracy at high transaction volumes have been achieved. In addition, improved information flow / management reporting has been provided to further enhance customer service.

■ Enhanced business management

Business Alerts and automated KPI reporting has improved business processes and management.

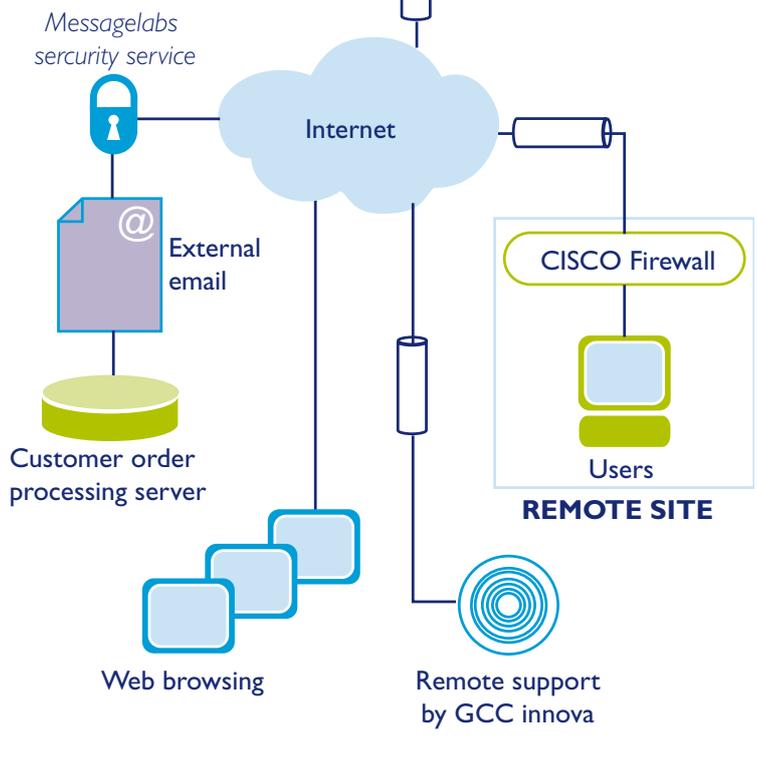
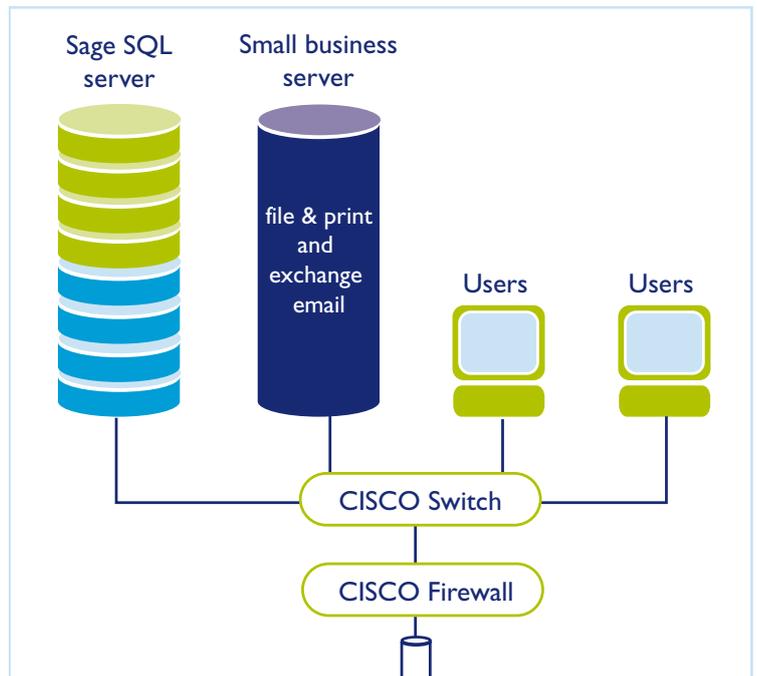
■ Remote site integration

Joining together remote sites via a wide area network onto the central IT platform improves information flow and operational efficiencies.

■ Single source responsibility

Avoids problems arising between the business application provider and the infrastructure supplier.

HEAD OFFICE



 = encrypted secure comms

At GCC innova we understand both application software and server hardware. We can therefore ensure that server performance, resilience and costs are optimised to meet each customer's requirements.

Infrastructure

All SQL servers are not the same!

There are many factors which affect a server's data processing speed and different applications need different server configurations. The main considerations for SQL servers involve a balancing act between performance, resilience, functionality and cost. In addition, correct set-up can have a dramatic impact on speed with little effect on cost. Server specification is a complex subject but the list below details some of the key considerations:-

What Operating System should I use?

- Windows 2003 versus Windows 2008
- 32 bit or 64 bit operating environment
- Small Business vs Std vs Enterprise server editions
- RAM limitations (4GB on some operating systems)
- Processor limitations, twin or quad core, 1,2 or more processors

What type / how many disks do I need?

- Normally RAID 1, 5 or 10 depending on resilience and application (can use more than one RAID configuration in a single server)
- Quantity and capacity of disks in a RAID

- Disk access speeds, (disk RPM) disk connectivity (SAS, SATA etc.)

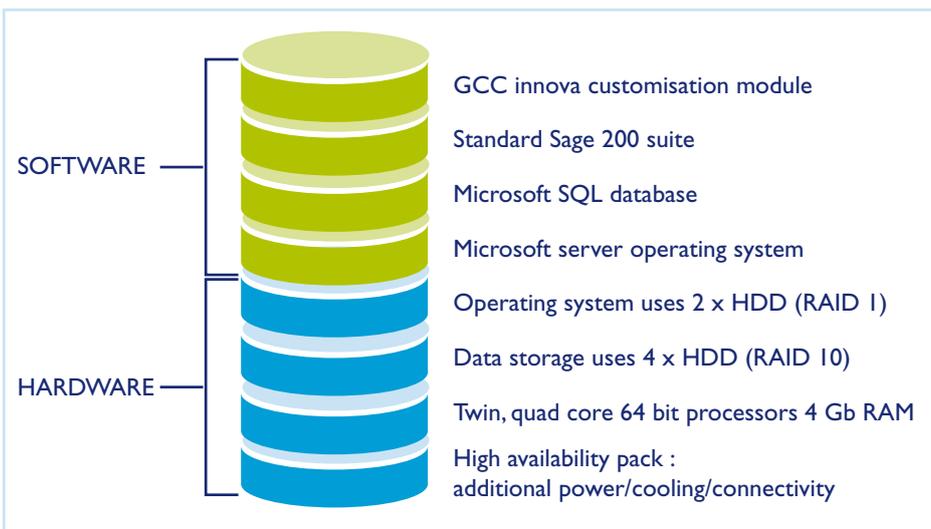
Why is the disk RAID controller important?

- On-board controller RAM for data processing speed
- Controller configuration to achieve correct read / write balance

How do I achieve high availability and resilience?

- Twin fan kits and twin power supply units
- Multiple GB network interface cards (also improves data speed on the network)
- RAID configuration (see above)
- 24/7 server monitoring (part of support contract)
- Server backup / automatic switchover (failover) using:
 - Server virtualisation – a rapid response through local virtualised images of servers
 - Hot swap blade servers
 - Failover server clustering
 - SQL database mirroring
 - SQL log shipping
 - Third party server mirroring solutions

SAGE SQL SERVER



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