Hyperconvergence takes on the cloud

London South Bank University (LSBU) improves student IT experiences—increasing satisfaction rates 25 percent— by migrating from a hybrid cloud solution

London South Bank University EST 1892

Higher Education | United Kingdom

Business needs

LSBU looked to transform its IT to deliver its 2020 strategy and become a leading centre of higher education by improving student experiences, driving research and strengthening links with local and international partners.

Solutions at a glance

- Dell EMC VxRail Hyperconverged Infrastructure
- Dell EMC SC Series storage
- Dell EMC Networking
- Dell Technologies Services
- Dell Financial Services
- VMware network virtualization and security software

Business results

- Has the IT foundation to be among the top 50 percent of U.K. universities for research and enterprise
- Delivers 2020 strategy to become leading London university
- Greater IT cost transparency by moving to opex model
- 47% faster IT delivery times through hyperconvergence

25%

increase in student satisfaction

60%

reduction in IT costs compared with legacy hybrid cloud solution

Universities in the United Kingdom are changing fast. They are transforming their IT infrastructures so they can prosper in a marketplace facing new challenges, including greater competition for students, who want nothing less than fast access to data anytime, anywhere.

2020 strategy goals

London South Bank University (LSBU), located in central London, is transforming its IT to successfully meet today's challenges. LSBU created its 2020 strategy document—a guide to address changes in higher education—giving IT centre stage. The strategy document states that technology is key to improving students' higher education experiences, driving post-graduate research, and building stronger links with local and international partners.

Transformation starts in the data centre

To deliver LSBU's 2020 strategy goals, however, the university needed to overhaul the existing infrastructure. LSBU had a hybrid cloud solution in which the virtual learning environment for students and line-of-business systems, such as human resources and finance, ran from a private cloud. In addition, the university operated two data centres for services including building access control, telephony and a student portal.

The main issue for LSBU was the cost of managing both the cloud and on-premises infrastructure. Alexander Denley, deputy director of Innovation & Transformation at LSBU, says, "Eighty percent of our time—and a significant part of our operating budget—was spent on 'keeping the lights on,' and just 20 percent was dedicated to innovation and improving services. We were just renting rack space. To deliver our 2020 programme and become a leading university in London, we needed to turn this around."

Hyperconvergence provides the answer

LSBU sought solutions from leading technology vendors, including Dell EMC. The Dell EMC team invited Denley and his colleagues to the Dell EMC Executive Briefing Center in London for a Dell Technologies Advantage and Transformation whiteboard discussion about traditional versus innovative solutions to deliver LSBU's goals. As Denley recalls, "I felt that Dell EMC really understood what we wanted to deliver, and when the team proposed the hyperconverged VxRail appliance, I believed we'd found what we were looking for. With VxRail, we could increase levels of innovation, and IT could deliver more value to the university."

Flexible financing removes possible barriers

Next, LSBU began talks with Dell Financial Services (DFS) so the university could invest in VxRail and stay within budget. "Without DFS," says Denley, "we couldn't have delivered such a transformational IT project for LSBU. DFS offered flexible financing options, so we weren't held back by an existing agreement with a previous provider. With Dell Financial Services behind us, we could press ahead with our transformation—delivering the project in one go."

Services support ensures seamless changeover

LSBU worked with Dell Technologies Services to implement the hyperconverged infrastructure. A project manager put together a core Dell Technologies team to work solidly on implementing the hardware as well as complete all testing before the hyperconverged solution went live. "It was as though Dell Technologies became part of our IT team," says Denley. Specialists on each part of the solution, including VxRail, storage, server, networking, data protection and VMware, assisted on the implementation. "Our collaboration with Dell Technologies Services was excellent," says Denley. "The solution crossover was seamless."

"We've cut our IT costs by 60 percent by transforming our IT with Dell Technologies."

Alexander Denley, Deputy Director of Innovation & Transformation, LSBU

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LSBU has deployed a VxRail stretched cluster in each of its two data centres, following an active-active configuration. Dell EMC Data Domain provides backup for each cluster. Dell EMC PowerEdge R640 servers run VMware NSX, Dell EMC SC3000 Series arrays store data, and Dell EMC Networking switches provide data links to the cloud and security. The solution also includes Dell EMC ProSupport Mission Critical assistance over five years.

2020—signed, sealed and delivered

LSBU can thrive in a changing higher education marketplace in line with its 2020 strategy. The university has put in place a transformational IT infrastructure to improve students' experiences, driving post-graduate research and building stronger connections with local and international partners. "Our solution from Dell Technologies is already having an impact," says Denley. "We've flipped the 80:20 statistic so that no more than 20 percent of our resource goes to keeping the lights on, and at least 80 percent goes to innovation. We've also gained complete transparency over IT by moving to an opex model, which means we can provide highly accurate cost analysis on any new service."

25% rise in satisfaction rates

Students are happy with the university's new IT services. A recent survey showed an increase of 25 percent in the number of students who were highly satisfied with the services. Comments Denley, "Any universities not delivering on their IT will have problems attracting students. That's why it's been so important for us to modernise our technology with Dell EMC. Students are seeing more value in our IT services. They are looking at it as a reason for investing not only their money, but also a significant period of their lives studying with us."

60% cost saving to enable new services

Compared with the previous hybrid infrastructure, LSBU's new IT infrastructure is more cost-effective. This, in turn, frees up resources to invest in new services that will continue to enhance student experiences as well as drive research and forge community links. "We've cut our IT costs by 60 percent by transforming our IT with Dell Technologies," says Denley. "Because we work with DFS and don't have to cover 100 percent of our IT costs up front, we also have greater opportunity to resource the analysis, development and delivery of new services that will add value to coming to LSBU."

"Our collaboration with Dell Technologies Deployment Services was excellent. The solution crossover was seamless."

Alexander Denley, Deputy Director of Innovation & Transformation, LSBU

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47% faster IT delivery

LSBU has consolidated compute, storage, networking and VMware-based virtualization on a single hyperconverged platform. This has helped eliminate manual processes and accelerate deployment times. "We've automated many management tasks with VxRail, simplifying operations to deliver IT 47 percent more quickly," says Denley. "Now, if we need to make changes, there's only one platform to go to. Plus, we can scale out the platform because of our financing agreement with DFS."

"With Dell Financial Services behind us, we could press ahead with our transformation— delivering the project in one go."

Alexander Denley, Deputy Director of Innovation & Transformation, LSBU
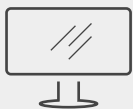
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