



Mendip Caravans Case Study

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Mendip Caravan Centre implement All-inONE Linux server to support company growth

Mendip Caravan Centre, a caravan retailer based in Weston-Super-Mare, has implemented a Linux-based All-inONE server to support their continuing business growth. Mendip, founded as a husband and wife team in 1984, has expanded rapidly to employ over 90 staff based at three sites across southwest England. This rapid expansion has forced Mendip to look at an alternative to replace their existing Novell server, which was struggling to cope with the increasing volume of files and data.

Setting up the new branches in tandem with introducing a caravan hire arm meant Mendip wanted as simple an IT implementation as possible, to allow them to focus on the revenue generating parts of the business.



"I can focus on my job..."

Mendip's primary concern, when choosing which server to implement, was that it needed to work independently and reliably over all three sites. Simon Speight, Central Administration Manager for Mendip Caravans, adopts the role of IT manager but in a part time capacity, therefore it was vital the system was robust.

Speight explains, "I didn't have any direct experience of Microsoft servers but plenty of experience of Microsoft desktop applications. This experience led me to the conclusion that the server might not stay running for more than a day! Trying to support three remote sites meant that Microsoft simply wasn't an option. But having researched the market, we felt an open source solution would be the most reliable and this has proved to be the case."

The caravan retail industry, similar to the car industry, operates on low margins so low IT overheads are essential to retain profitability. Speight says: "Initially we saved a huge amount as we were not required



"...makes me look good "

to pay a licence fee for the Linux server. However, we have also seen that our labour costs have been reduced as there has been less maintenance, and downtime has been prevented. Essentially this means I can focus on my job rather than maintaining the server, and add real value to the business instead of fire-fighting."

The three offices vary in size, the largest having twenty PCs and the smallest having two. Speight believes that the All-inONE is perfect for all sizes of company, and says that if Mendip were to double in size again he would have no qualms that it would cope. Mendip are also hoping to introduce another server at a fourth location to act as a Disaster Recovery function. This would be offsite, so that if anything were to occur on-site, no data would be lost.

Of Special Note:

- Business critical communications application
- Multi-site VPN links
- Mendip have no Linux background or expertise
- PC's all use Microsoft operating systems
- Minimal support issues

Impressive Support

Mendip have been so impressed with the support that they are currently in the process of installing a Virtual Private Network (VPN). Speight had previously been told that this was a complicated procedure, and would not have considered tackling it. He was delighted to find that implementing these networks simply involved clicking on the right options and there was no need to understand the technology. Speight says,

"We are only just beginning to experience the benefits."

Using an open source server has impressed Speight so much that he has sought to implement open source across other areas of the business. Instead of using Microsoft Outlook he now uses Mozilla Thunderbird, and is considering replacing Internet Explorer with Mozilla Firefox.

Mendip also take advantage of

the upgrade path to keep pace with new software releases. Speight concludes,

"The system introduces things that I wouldn't otherwise have considered. I am confident that when a new technological advance is made, wherever possible they will introduce it to our system. When it comes down to it, as the person responsible for IT, This server makes me look good and you can't ask for anything more than that!"

inONE Ltd.

PO Box 4040
Christchurch
BX23 1XW
UK

' 0845-1300-404
š sales@inone.com