

Databarracks' case study

UNICEF UK USES DATABARRACKS FOR IT BACKUP AND RECOVERY

About UNICEF UK

UNICEF UK promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child. The organisation raises funds for UNICEF's emergency and development work and advocates for lasting change for children everywhere.

Around 220 people are employed by UNICEF UK. Almost all are based at UNICEF House in Clerkenwell, Central London. UNICEF also employs a number of remote workers throughout the UK.

The Challenge

Today, UNICEF UK's overall IT strategy seeks to embrace new technologies in order to better support their core mission: 'to raise money for UNICEF's global work for children and their rights'. For ICT Director Ian Williamson, this meant moving with the changing market conditions and collaborating with specialist 3rd party service providers to improve services, reduce complexity and generate efficiencies among UNICEF UK's staff.

"Whilst things like Service Level Agreements and Recovery Point Objectives look good on paper, it's the user experience that's most important to me: it provides the best indication of whether a given system is really working. My goal was to provide the staff with high quality technology services without having to maintain the systems that drive them.

UNICEF UK is updating its technology solutions as opportunities allow. Databarracks were selected to upgrade the charity's backup and disaster recovery systems. UNICEF UK rely on the voluntary contributions of their generous donors to support its work. Consequently, the underlying data that enables this (relating to their donor network) is mission-critical, both to the sustainability of the organisation and their ability to respond to international crises quickly.

"Data is the lifeblood of our organisation. More than any other digital asset we possess, our donor information is most critical to us. If we experienced data loss during an overseas crisis, it could impact on for the aid we're able to deliver. As such, strong backup and disaster recovery is very important for such irreplaceable data. - Ian Williamson, ICT Director at UNICEF UK

Another factor driving UNICEF UK's backup needs is the significant data growth they're experiencing as a consequence of newer methods used to engage with their donor network.

For instance, the use of rich media content, such as video, has proven to be a particularly effective fundraising tool.

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“The generosity of our donors is both overwhelming and vital to our mission. As such, it’s important that we proactively demonstrate exactly where their money goes and the great things it enables us to do. Video is a really great way to do that. Whether we’re building a school or running a vaccination initiative, bringing that positive evidence back in to the giving community is a big part of what we do.”

Consequently, this mixture of mission-critical customer data and high-volume, high-value digital media rendered UNICEF UK’s legacy tape-based backup solution unviable. In parallel to this, and in order to make their disaster recovery solution compatible with the new IT infrastructure (introduced under the wider refresh programme) UNICEF UK contracted Databarracks to refresh both systems.

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The Solution

Upon electing to consolidate its real estate portfolio, UNICEF UK closed its Billericay office, which had also served as their failover site, and moved into a centralised London office at UNICEF House in Clerkenwell.

The office move served as an ideal catalyst for UNICEF UK to update business critical IT infrastructure, in which Ian Williamson sought to improve IT services and generate efficiencies by collaborating with service providers.

“My main priority is to ensure that UNICEF UK is not preoccupied with running IT systems. Our job is to support staff to help the world’s children. If embracing a new technology enables us to do that job better, whether that’s becoming more agile or cost-effective or otherwise, then it makes sense for us to adopt it.”

After assessing the backup and disaster recovery provider market, Ian turned to industry peers for trusted partner recommendations. Databarracks didn’t take long to come up, and for IT Manager Steve Field, the recommendation was justified.

“The closure of our Billericay office meant the backup stage of the project was the most time-critical. It was reassuring to work with a provider capable of sticking to that deadline, regardless of challenges encountered along the way.

Everyone involved ensured it went very smoothly. There was nothing in my log that flagged as a potential show-stopper.” - Steve Field, IT Manager at UNICEF UK

Over the course of a few weeks, Databarracks transferred approximately 7 terabytes of UNICEF UK’s critical customer data and media content to The Bunker – the ultra-secure data centre housed in an ex-military nuclear bunker.

Following the backup stage, Databarracks began the testing phase to implement a disaster recovery plan compatible with UNICEF UK’s newly virtualised systems.

“We immediately got to know our engineer, even before the second stage got underway. Claudiu came to see us and spent two days doing data analysis to establish what testing would be required. It transpired that some of our applications needed optimisation for the proposed Citrix-based thin-client DR plan. It was great to work with a team that can handle that kind of complexity.”- Steve Field, IT Manager at UNICEF UK

During this stage Databarracks worked closely with a group of pre-existing suppliers within the wider change project.

This ensured UNICEF UK's systems were upgraded in parallel with one another, and as non-disruptively as possible.

"We've collaborated with a lot of suppliers in the past and Databarracks are one of the easiest to work with. If an issue arose, Databarracks would just deal with the problem directly."

Databarracks then completed an invocation of the disaster recovery plan to check all of the initial challenges had been resolved.

"Databarracks completely documented the process for it and we now have an invocation plan that we can provide to the business that completely covers IT for DR. Throughout the whole project they took ownership of the challenges rather than just saying issues were 'out of scope' and handing them back to us."
- Steve Field, IT Manager at UNICEF UK

After the successful completion of both elements of the project, Ian Williamson reflected on the smooth transition to the new services, particularly in light of the office move.

"The closure of our second office in Billericay was a big piece of business change.

Being able to not only respond to that nondisruptively, but to supplement it with actual improvements to existing services, like backup and DR, was very significant."

Equally, by using Databarracks' Backup as a Service, UNICEF UK have gained greater insight into the cost effectiveness of their IT systems, as well as greatly improved levels of support and protection for their mission-critical customer data.

However, the new backup systems have also enabled the organisation to continue developing innovative fundraising strategies, such as the production of rich media content to promote amongst their donor network.

"It's also enabled us to expand our current activities around digital media. Where previously we were limited by the scale and complexity of backup, we're now in a position to expand on our successes to date."

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About Databarracks

Databarracks is the UK's specialist business continuity and IT disaster recovery provider.

In 2003, we launched one of the world's first true managed backup services to bring indestructible resilience to mission critical data.

Today, we deliver award winning data and continuity services from some of the most secure data centres in the world, 30 metres below ground in ex-military nuclear bunkers, supported 24/7/365 by our team of handpicked experts.

We make enterprise-class continuity, security and resilience accessible for organisations of all sizes.

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