



## It's care with wheels!

One company which knows all about Brandon's Total Care managed service is vehicle management and maintenance company Secure Fleet. As a new business, Secure Fleet needed a secure and stable IT environment. With Brandon and the Total Care service, Secure Fleet got what it was looking for.

"We wanted the IT systems to work like turning on the lights," says managing director Paul Sweeney. "The Total Care Package offered just what we were looking for."

Using a combination of Dell hardware, Microsoft server and desktop software, allied with Total Care, Brandon was able to deliver a comprehensive solution for the ongoing management of Secure Fleet's entire infrastructure. Employees at Secure Fleet don't have to spend time problem solving IT issues because Brandon effectively works as a fully furnished outsourced IT department for the company.

"Brandon simply get the job done; they get to the problem before we even know a problem has occurred," Sweeney comments.

books today. "The customers we take on board are still dealing with us today," he says. For many customers, Brandon is "to all intents and purposes, their IT department".

### Beyond the traditional

Part of the business is focused on larger companies where Brandon is involved in high-level projects, mostly around Microsoft and virtualisation, that the customer does not have the skills internally

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Too many small businesses are afraid to call in service providers because they fear what the bill will be. BILLY MacINNES reports

When times get tough, it's not just the tough that get going. All around the country, businesses – big and small – are grappling with the consequences of a recession and accompanying credit squeeze that have applied the brakes to an Irish economy which, not so long ago, seemed to be cruising at 100 miles an hour. Now, instead of a road paved with gold, the journey is strewn with pot-holes.

Adding to the business pressures, particularly for small firms that do not have their own in-house IT manager, is the issue of how they implement and manage their IT infrastructure. Even for those that do employ an IT manager, there is mounting pressure over whether it

makes sense to maintain a position which might look like a luxury to those holding the purse strings.

Not surprisingly, many small businesses will be considering outsourcing at least part of their IT operation to a local 'trusted adviser' with the skills and knowledge to effectively manage and maintain their computer systems. Which is where Brandon Consulting comes in. Founded in 1998, the company has grown from an initial staff of three to 28 employees, with bases in Dublin and Galway – and, according to sales director Gary Melvin, it's still growing.

As a measure of its longevity, Melvin points out that Brandon's first ever client – LifeStyle Sports – is still on the company's

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to handle. When it comes to small companies, Brandon's main attraction is in providing managed services to customers ranging from five or 10 desktop PCs to as many as 100 or 200.

Brandon's offering goes way beyond the traditional service of providing customers with central procurement of IT hardware, software and accessories. "We completely manage all aspects of their IT for them," Melvin says. Brandon can proactively monitor all the endpoints on a customer's IT infrastructure, make sure daily tasks, such as security checks, backups and updates to anti-virus and anti-spam, are completed. This reduces the amount of downtime for a customer's IT network and the need to have support call outs.

As part of its service, Brandon provides access to a central IT helpdesk, call

## Total care package

With disaster recovery, anti-virus and anti-spam, patch and update management services, Brandon Consulting's Total Care package essentially wraps together all the tasks which many small businesses should be doing but might not be, according to sales director Gary Melvin. "We're giving it to them at a manageable cost and provided by people who know what they're doing. It's about budget and trust, and hopefully we can address both."

logging and reporting portal, remote support when necessary and onsite support when required.

The monitoring process automatically creates a ticket on the Brandon help desk if an action is required. If someone needs to go onsite, the task is automatically scheduled. The company also has a Professional Services division on hand if the situation is escalated. All of which fits with the Brandon ethos of "you manage your business, we'll manage the technology behind it".

The company also has monthly reporting scheduled with customers, when a representative sits down and talks with the managing director or financial controller to cover off what has been done

WE INVEST A LOT OF TIME IN PARTNERSHIPS AND INDUSTRY CERTIFICATIONS TO MAKE SURE OUR CUSTOMERS ARE GETTING CERTIFIED ENGINEERS AND THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY

- GARY MELVIN, SALES DIRECTOR, BRANDON CONSULTING



over the course of the month and to discuss outstanding issues. Melvin says the meetings also serve as a way for Brandon to "get into the business, to try to understand the business and see where we can use IT to add value. We like to immerse ourselves in our client's business where we can. It's one of our key differentiators".

## Fixed monthly cost

Brandon's Total Care Managed Services are provided to small business customers for a fixed monthly cost. One of the benefits is that the cost remains the same whether a customer needs someone onsite for 30 days or for one day. Melvin says Brandon has over 50 small business clients, with two or three being added every month.

He recognises that small companies "have an aversion at first to paying a monthly cost, but they pay probably a bit more on a reactive basis. The challenge is to change the mindset of small businesses to invest to ensure everything keeps working rather than calling out support when something goes wrong".

There are some small businesses which are pro-technology, but there are also those which look on it as a cost as opposed to a tool. Brandon is keen to stress that it can bring businesses competitive advantage. For example, it can help customers to automate business processes and save time. "We'll take a month or two to stabilise what the customer has and make sure there are no issues," Melvin says. "Once that's done, we'll start working on what we can do above the technology the customer already has. Some of our customers have invested in Microsoft technology and they're using only 10 or 20% of it. That's the type of stuff I and other people in the company enjoy."

Melvin admits it takes time to build up trust among customers, and one of the ways of achieving this is with references from Brandon's existing customers. He also thinks it's worth emphasising Brandon's strong relationships with leading IT companies such as Microsoft, Dell and VMWare as solid evidence of its credentials as a provider of IT services and support.

He claims it is "one of the top five Microsoft partners in the country", one of only a few Dell Solutions Partners and Dell Service Delivery Partners as well as a VMWare enterprise partner.

"We invest a lot of time in partnerships and industry certifications to make sure our customers are getting certified engineers and the latest technology," Melvin says.

## Money-back scheme

And the company is not afraid of putting its money where its mouth is, offering a money-back guarantee to any company wishing to give the service a try, something which he categorises as "an investment in trust". Essentially, Brandon will take over a company's IT systems for a month, review them, work out a plan and engage with the customer "as if we were taking over full-time".

According to Melvin, the money-back scheme is a bid to "try and take the risk out of it". He says a lot of small businesses may have engaged with IT companies before "and may not have seen the benefits". This way, Brandon can demonstrate the advantages of a managed service approach to prospective customers, at no cost to them if they opt not to go ahead with it.

At a time when many small businesses are understandably concerned about costs in their operation, many might find the option of a fixed monthly cost for their IT attractive. It's certainly something Brandon thinks they should consider.

Melvin is convinced that the managed service route is a road well worth taking for small businesses compared to their current ad hoc IT arrangements. "A lot of small businesses are afraid to call in service providers because they're not sure what the bill will be," he observes. "With a managed service you know the cost of the service for the year and there aren't any surprises." ■