

Case Study

TACKLING IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

LONDON
METROPOLITAN
NETWORK
Higher. Further. Faster.

Valuable insights on implementation of new technology have been gained from a trial of Information Lifecycle Management (ILM) by two London colleges, with support from LMN. The colleges were already successfully using the VBAK service for data backup from InTechnology but, faced with increased data volumes, decided to trial ILM - it offers archiving options at lower cost as an alternative to backing up all data with VBAK. The trial highlighted the need for detailed technical mapping and for training prior to implementation, as well as key points on working with suppliers.

“We aim to help and support our members as much as possible in developing new services - in this case, we have worked to ensure that implementation issues have been clarified and important lessons learned for the future,” said LMN Business Development Manager Maria Iliia.

Successful service

In common with most organisations today, the Ravensbourne College of Arts (RC) and the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) were experiencing rapid growth in their data volumes, with accompanying difficulties in providing effective data backup and restore. Both institutions are committed to providing high levels of service to their staff and students, and decided to subscribe to InTechnology’s VBAK service for data backup, offered at competitive rates through LMN.

VBAK is offered as a Managed Service, with data backed up on an automated basis and transferred offsite to a secure Data Centre, from which individual files or complete data sets can be rapidly retrieved, not only for day to day user requests but also for disaster recovery and business continuity.

Both RC and the RAM found the VBAK service successful in meeting their data backup requirements.

“Around 20% of our Members are subscribing to the VBAK service and we value the partnership with InTechnology which has made it possible for institutions to benefit from this service on advantageous terms,” said Maria Iliia.

Escalating data volumes

Data volumes in the academic world are continuing to rise exponentially and, after two years of successfully using VBAK to backup their data, RC and the RAM were looking for additional capacity.

With increasing pressure on IT budgets, both RC and RAM were also looking for ways to reduce the cost of data backup. They were aware that some elements of the data being backed up on a daily basis, especially email data, could be archived for occasional reference only. For these reasons, the institutions were interested in the Information Lifecycle Management solution offered by InTechnology in partnership with Symantec.

The Information Lifecycle Management solution aims to address IT issues such as spiralling Exchange email data volumes, storage of stale or inactive Windows file system and email data, retention of records for regulatory purposes. Using the Symantec Enterprise Vault 2007 archiving system, it enables customers to increase the functionality of Outlook, both on the desktop and using OWA, by adding the user option to archive/restore emails.

The business case

“Many of our members have been experiencing unforeseen increases in data volumes and LMN Business Development Group decided that we should tackle this issue by evaluating the Information Lifecycle Management service in a formal trial,” *explained Maria Iliia.*

RC had a business case for ILM to reduce data volumes on VBAK and thus reduce the cost of the VBAK service. The College also aimed to implement an effective archiving service for Netscape mail files stored on a Windows based server platform.

RAM also had a business case for ILM to reduce data volumes on VBAK and thus reduce the cost of the VBAK service. The Academy also aimed to implement an effective archive service for MS Exchange / Outlook.

“Both these institutions had found the VBAK service from InTechnology to be effective and made a good business case for implementing an Information Lifecycle Management system,” *said Maria Iliia.*

Implementation issues

After some months of implementation of the ILM solution, both RC and RAM decided to discontinue it. **“As this was the first use within the LMN community of this promising service, we decided to begin a review of the service trial and talk to all the people concerned,”** *explained Maria Iliia.*

Some key issues emerged in the LMN review on how to achieve successful implementation and avoid difficulties by detailed technical planning and training.

“The institutions were led to believe that this was a totally Managed Service, which was probably why it was hard to contact them and troubleshoot sometimes,” *explained InTechnology’s Account Manager Anton Murphy.* **“Also, they didn’t go on ILM training until a long while after the solution had been rolled out onto their servers, which was a problem.”**

“Ravensbourne College had not received the technical support that they had expected as part of the service,” *explained Miles Metcalfe, IT Manager at RC.*

“We feel these problems were down to ILM not actually supporting their environment - i.e., Netscape mail is unsupported and the quota management software - Northern Storage - is unsupported,” *said InTechnology.*

The RAM had problems in implementation: **“Every time we thought it was working, something else would go wrong”** *explained Chris Meaney, Head of Technology at RAM.* **“It took almost a year to get it live, with many problems along the way. We were led to believe that this was a mature solution, however it felt more like a pilot as it was apparent that InTechnology struggled to resolve issues and simply kept blaming our setup, which was erroneous.”**

“We feel the problems were down to RAM changing their domain policies - for example, the “File Placeholder” was being blocked by the Windows firewall,” *explained InTechnology.*

Clarity and communication

In the review on the service trial conducted by LMN, issues on clarity and communication also emerged.

“InTechnology has an impressive track record for successful technology and provide effective services to many LMN members; however, in relation to ILM, they need to improve their sales and service documentation, to avoid the confusion that resulted in customers believing that this is a managed service,” *said Maria Iliia.*

“They also have to improve their pre-implementation technical audit of the customer’s infrastructure and clearly define in writing how the service will work. It’s important that success criteria are clearly defined too so that progress towards an agreed set of goals can be measured. They need to clarify to prospective customers that training is mandatory prior to service activation.”

Key points on managing suppliers

The LMN Business Development Group review highlighted important points for prospective members on how to manage pilot projects and trials of new services:

- Never rely on a supplier to manage the implementation process of a new solution or a new service – make sure that you have internal or hired in project management resource
- Make sure that you have documented your business case for implementing this service and that this is related directly to the implementation’s success criteria
- Agree the success criteria with your supplier
- Agree roles and timescales with your supplier
- Make sure you have the resources to commit to achieve the timescales that are agreed
- Refer to the JISC best practice guidelines on project management http://www.jisc.ac.uk/proj_manguide.html

LMN can help

“One of our key objectives at LMN is to support our members in finding and implementing the technology that will help them provide top-quality service to their staff and students,” *emphasised Maria Iliia.* **“In this case we have worked with our members and InTechnology to learn valuable lessons for the future.”**

“Institutions within the academic community in London have a lot in common and one of the values of our LMN community is that members can benefit from shared information and experience. We are always happy to facilitate contact between the IT staff of our member institutions and the staff of other members who may be able to advise on specific technical matters, or general project management. Simple moral support within the LMN community can be important - sometimes two heads are better than one!”