FIRST TECH CREDIT UNION

First Tech Credit Union works with IGEL to boost security and slash EUC costs

First Tech Credit Union, an ICT sector focused credit union headquartered in Dublin, has transitioned to VDI to introduce a fast, flexible, secure and easy to manage desktop computing environment for staff which is cost effective to run.

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~ John Harrington
   First Tech's Head of IT and Change Management

THE CUSTOMER

- First Tech Credit Union
- Over 14,000 members
- Issues loans worth €13.1 million and has assets totalling €221 million

THE CHALLENGE

- Increasing compliance and security requirements
- Limited IT administrator resource
- A need to migrate from PCs and Windows 7

THE SOLUTION

- IGEL UD3 desktops.
- IGEL UMS
- Microsoft's Remote Desktop Server (RDS) 2016 platform

THE BENEFITS

- Compliant and secure
- Simplified centralised administration
- Improved staff and customer experience

First Tech Credit Union provides loans and foreign exchange, and other current account-like services, for 14,391 members throughout Ireland's 26 counties. Last year, it issued loans worth €13.1 million and has assets on its balance sheet totalling €221 million. It provides services to over 50 companies in the ICT sector.

First Tech Credit Union, an ICT sector focused credit union headquartered in Dublin and formerly known as ESCCU, has transitioned to VDI to introduce a fast, flexible, secure and easy to manage desktop computing environment for staff which is cost effective to run.

First Tech has invested in Microsoft's Remote Desktop Server (RDS) 2016 platform – load balanced to ensure uptime and high availability – along with IGEL OS and IGEL UD3 endpoints for its VDI solution. First Tech 's staff now use both to access Progress Banking – its core financial management system – along with a range of cloud-based applications such as Office 365 and SharePoint.

Credit unions are non-profit-making money cooperatives whose members borrow from pooled deposits at lower interest rates compared to traditional banks. Founded in 1965 originally as an industrial credit union for telecoms firm, Eir, First Tech's common bond changed a few years ago, with the organisation evolving to offer a range of financial products to the whole of the Irish ICT sector. Today it provides loans and foreign exchange, with other current account-like services, for 14,391 members throughout Ireland's 26 counties. Last year, it issued loans worth €13.1 million and has assets on its balance sheet totalling €221 million. It provides services to over 50 companies in the ICT sector.

John Harrington, First Tech's Head of IT and Change Management says, "Most of Ireland's 251 credit unions don't have experienced or dedicated IT staff in-house, but embracing technology is key.

Not only do we now operate in a highly regulated industry, but it's now vital to deliver strategic value to the business that ensures high-quality customer experience. We are a low staff tech organisation, but it does get very busy very quickly in operations at First Tech. Like any public facing environment, it would be pandemonium if staff couldn't get into systems to respond to members' financial needs, quickly."

IT TRANSFORMATION PROJECT INITIATIVE LAUNCHED

Like many other organisations, First Tech was heavily dependent on using traditional PCs which it considered unsustainable. In an increasingly compliance and security focused sector, resourcing the needs of a PC per staff member was not seen as economically the best option. There was no underlying solution in place for the credit union to ensure system redundancy and underpin future growth, and the cost of licensing, deploying and maintaining security solutions was seen was better served using alternative platforms.

Harrington explains, "Our new leadership team knows best-of-breed IT solutions are required to deliver a responsive online service, particularly to tech-savvy members. The public want things immediately, which requires infrastructure that is fast, secure and functional. This drove an IT review and the start of a transformational review in 2017."

This has included a range of initiatives: ranging from a whole new blade-based server farm, installing a CRM system for the first time, the adoption of Office 365, redundant firewalls, data retention policies and procedures, and – of course – shifting away from PCs running Windows 7. These clients connected to a legacy Windows Server 2003 platform but migrated to Microsoft RDS 2016 and with IGEL thin clients delivering the VDI experience. First Tech ran a pilot for Amazon Alexa – the first time this has been done by a credit union.

As part of this comprehensive review process, First Tech selected one of Ireland's largest and best-known managed services providers (MSP), Ergo, to develop and look after its systems and provide helpdesk support. Initially they didn't support Linux-based endpoints. Harrington explains, "In a thin client environment, Linux is renowned for being secure and reliable – thus less Helpdesk tickets for the MSP. Once Ergo considered this, they decided to change tactics and support IGEL which has been a huge plus and made it a very manageable solution for us."

SOFTWARE-DEFINED ENDPOINTS IDEAL FOR CREDIT UNIONS

IGEL's technology delivers many other benefits:

1. The Universal Management Suite (UMS) is user-friendly and feature-rich making the whole IGEL environment easy to centrally manage which includes applying policies to all or specific devices.

2. The UMS also allows the easy provisioning of IGEL equipment when they are installed. When new endpoints are plugged into the network, they auto-register with the UMS so roll out is quick. Furthermore, the IGEL terminals come with a five-year warranty for peace of mind. Harrington says, "As a not-for-profit organisation, we can't afford to buy and maintain high-overhead devices.
I don't know of any other end-point in the world that's got that type of warranty on it."

3. Security has been maximised as IGEL's Linux OS is 'read only'. First Tech's security position on data and devices means nothing leaves the building. All endpoint devices are locked down with staff only able to access the RDS platform;

4. Reliability has been enhanced. First Tech estimates that it has realized a 70% reduction in terms of maintenance and increase in availability of end-user devices as result;

5. The IGEL OS is flexible and will allow First Tech to embrace open source software or fully transition to the cloud as it wishes with no impact on the endpoint devices already purchased. Indeed, the credit union expects to move services to the cloud wherever possible by 2023. Harrington says, "Think of the old adverts 'Anytime, anyplace, anywhere'. That's what we want to do with IT delivery for members – focused around value and performance."

6. The end-user experience has been enhanced. VDI has been set so that end-users only need to login once and the form factor of the UD3 devices – compared to cumbersome PCs – is small. This means they fit neatly under each desk and make hot-desking easier so that First Tech can make office space savings.

Andrew Gee, IGEL's VP Sales Northern Europe, says, "We believe that First Tech is the only credit union in Ireland to use thin client endpoints. Some might think the technology is complicated. It genuinely isn't and has a raft of OPEX and CAPEX savings which will appeal to many other cost-conscious organisations in this sector."

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