Stellar Projects
A CodeBlue Customer Story

STELLAR | PROJECT DELIVERY SPECIALISTS

CodeBlue and Microsoft build agile cloud future for growing Stellar Projects

Stellar Projects is a consultancy that combines multiple disciplines to build environments and infrastructure for people, places and technology.

Our services span strategy, planning and consents, design, construction management, quantity surveying, project management and asset/facilities maintenance within the commercial, infrastructure and residential sectors.

When your company is growing rapidly and you're handling big projects on demand, like kiwi consultancy Stellar Projects, agility isn't a nice to have – it's essential.

The company, which has offices in Auckland, Wellington and Whangarei, provides a large portfolio of services, including strategy, planning and consents, design, construction management, quantity surveying and asset maintenance, for commercial, infrastructure and residential customers.

Its customer base includes Auckland Transport, Auckland Zoo, councils, NGOs, developers and private and public sector organisations, with high profile projects including Auckland's City Rail Link, Auckland Zoo's Pridelands animal enclosure and Elephant House restaurant, Sanford's Fishmarket and work for the Northern Busway and Manukau Bus Station.

Stellar Projects - CITY RAIL LINK

> "We work hard to understand a customer's business, where they're going, what growth plans they have, any concerns for their budget, compliance issues and so on…"

Hussain Al Hasani
Business Development Manager - CodeBlue

Technology limitations

But while the company's business was thriving, with a diverse and enviable portfolio of projects and engagements, its technology was proving more challenging.

"Our server was old technology and we were keen to transition to cloud technology," says Stellar Projects Business Improvement and Resourcing Manager, Maria Ridon.

"We wanted to remove our reliance on the server hosting our Newforma project file management software, to be completely cloud-based and to have a standard setup for staff."

Stellar Projects was running a range of different hardware devices and software, including several variations of the Windows operating system and Office, while also using hosted servers and a managed WAN service which required users to dial in via VPN to access the servers whenever they were outside the office.

For a company meeting deadlines for critical projects, that was an issue, with staff feeling tethered to the office, where the connection was better, rather than having the flexibility to work from anywhere, as needed.

Stellar Projects knew moving to a cloud-first infrastructure would enable increased agility. The company is growing fast and wanted technology to be enabling the growth, rather than holding the company back.

"They wanted to be more agile, to be able to access things on the go, to have increased disaster recovery capabilities, and easier IT support," says CodeBlue Business Development Manager Hussain Al Hasani.

Security was also a key factor, with the company having experienced several phishing attacks in the past. While many kiwi small businesses have the view that they're too small to be a target, Stellar Projects was fully aware its customers are not small at all, and was keen to protect itself, and its customers, from any potential attacks.

> "We wanted to remove our reliance on the server…to be completely cloud-based and to have a standard setup for staff."

Maria Ridon
Business Improvement & Resourcing Manager - Stellar Projects

Mapping a path to success

CodeBlue worked with Stellar Projects to create a strategic roadmap for the company. It's a critical factor in the success of any project, Hussain says.

"We work hard to understand a customer's business, where they're going, what growth plans they have, any concerns for their budget, compliance issues and so on, as well as what technology they already have, before creating a strategic roadmap for what their future could look like," he says.

"Every business is unique, so we invest a lot of time upfront, to understand each business, so that we can draft up a technology plan that suits their needs and achieves all that they are looking for." For Stellar Projects, CodeBlue's investment up front in creating a strategic roadmap has reaped big benefits.

"CodeBlue provided a straightforward, effective solution to remove the server and licensing costs associated with Newforma," Maria says. "They provided a clear plan for the rollout of the process, provided a pilot solution for testing and effectively achieved the desired results."

The company's entire IT environment was standardised, ensuring any future deployments will be quicker, and Stellar Projects finally got its wish of being cloud-first, with the increased agility that come with it.

The two servers Stellar Projects had been relying on were decommissioned as was the costly WAN, replaced instead by Microsoft Azure Active Directory and SharePoint Online. It was a move that eliminated a huge amount of cost from the business. "The move has brought us cost savings and reliability," Maria says.

Creating a modern workplace

As part of the modern workplace and deployment of a standardised operation environment, CodeBlue deployed Microsoft Enterprise Mobility + Security (EMS) across devices to bolster the company's security posture, while InTune provided easy mobile device management.

"EMS in combination with InTune gives us control over devices and enables us to have a single, centralised point of control for users and devices in the company," Hussain says. "Using InTune we can apply flexible mobile device and app management controls, push out policy and procedures to all devices so that Stellar's team can work how they want, while ensuring the company information remains protected.

"EMS also adds increased security, including forcing password resets if needed." Email auditing is also available, while smart rules around emails also minimise the cybersecurity risk. All devices were upgraded to Windows 10 Pro and staff were given access to the Office 365 productivity suite, with many staff also provided with Project Online Professional and Visio Online where needed.

Azure Active Directory (AD) has been deployed giving Stellar Projects the ability to connect to the cloud, with one centralised place that all devices check in, implementing policies and procedures across the company.

The combination of Microsoft Office 365, EMS and Azure AD provides an unprecedented level of control for administrators, allowing them to have control of the environment through a simple and intuitive interface.

Enabling mobility and enhanced productivity

The use of cloud technology means Stellar's team can now quickly, easily – and securely – access their work system from anywhere.

"It's important nowadays to provide mobility for end users and to give them the freedom to collaborate with each other, share information and work on the go, how they like," Hussain says. All of which, he notes, is a boon for productivity.

Stellar Projects has begun using SharePoint Online to facilitate sharing of company news, health and safety, and HR information, effectively providing an intranet to ensure all staff are up to date on company happenings. A new initiative will see H&S forms, such as Hazard Registers and incident reporting forms being accessed via SharePoint. The platform has become a key source of information for Stellar Projects' team.

> ## "It's important nowadays to provide mobility for end users and to give them the freedom to collaborate with each other, share information and work on the go, how they like"

Hussain Al Hasani
Business Development Manager
CodeBlue

Stellar Projects - PRIDELANDS ENCLOSURE

> "It's a great example of how moving to the cloud can enable fast growth for Kiwi companies"

Hussain Al Hasani
Business Development Manager CodeBlue

Growth expectations

The upgraded environment has also made expansion a breeze -– at least on the technology side. In the eight months after CodeBlue and Stellar Projects began working together the consultancy has grown from 40 staff across two sites to over 60 staff across four offices in three locations.

"Being in the cloud definitely helped them be more agile," Hussain says. "If they had wanted to add that many staff on the old system, it would have likely required an expensive server upgrade, and would have taken a lot of time to configure all the end-user devices as well.

"It's a great example of how moving to the cloud can enable fast growth for kiwi companies."

Under the previous setup, it took days to get new hardware setup and ready for action, with the previous IT provider needing to go on site to configure the hardware – a method Hussain notes is outdated given modern technology.

Using the Microsoft Deployment Toolkit, CodeBlue set up images for Stellar's different work teams, providing standardised systems depending on the user's requirements.

Using MDT saw deployment times reduced from days to two hours. Software is automatically assigned and pushed to the device, based on the user's profile: Account team members automatically receive relevant software, while project managers have a different profile providing software relevant for them, for example.

It's a method that ensures consistency across all devices and that no important policies, procedures or obligations are missed, as they sometime can be with manual configurations. It also enables rapid expansion with minimal effort, Hussain notes.

"Deploying a standardised operating environment (SOE) means it's really easy to accommodate any requests from Stellar Projects," he says. "When they opened the new office, it took us minimal time to get devices up and running. It was just a case of providing the laptops with the image and connecting to the internet. All they need is an internet connection and they are fully live with all their applications and folders, and the PC checks in, deploys the antivirus and all the other rules."

The rollout of the new system saw zero downtime for Stellar Projects.

THE CODEBLUE DIFFERENCE

Stellar Projects' team were so happy with the service they received from CodeBlue that they took to referring to the IT services provider as part of their own team.

"We pride ourselves on providing exceptional customer experience," Hussain says. "That comes first with us. From the very start we ensure we are completely transparent, workshopping solutions with them, showing them the tools we have and the vision we have. It's a partnership and the customer is part of the journey from the very beginning.

"It's not about technology just for the sake of technology. We're working with customers like Stellar Projects to help them achieve their business strategies, whatever they might be."