



ITSmartSolutions



How a Modern Workplace kept an NFP, The Centre for Independent Studies, operating during floods and COVID-19



The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) is a not-for-profit research organisation, with the head office located in Sydney. CIS employs more than 20 staff who, through public policy research, media exposure and events, aim to encourage debate among leading academics, politicians, media, and the public.

Cost-effective cloud solution required to replace servers

Until 2018, CIS had relied on on-premise servers, with IT managed by a part time internal staff member. With the servers reaching end of life, and the IT coordinator moving on, the team at CIS knew it was time for a change.

After conducting due diligence, the then General Manager Jenny Lindsay, selected IT Smart Solutions as their new IT Managed Service Provider (MSP).

CIS first approached IT Smart Solutions with a problem in the mail server. However, knowing the on-premise servers were set to expire, Jenny also wanted to improve the overall IT infrastructure, bolster security, and improve productivity. With no internal specialist IT resource, CIS also required ongoing support and guidance from IT Smart Solutions.

As a first step, Managing Director Steve Ranson and the IT Smart Solutions team conducted a full review of CIS' existing IT environment. In addition to exploring what they had, Steve ensured that he had a clear understanding of CIS as an organisation and what they wanted to do, now and in the future. According to the current CIS General Manager, Jane Black, this step has been integral to the successful partnership.

“ Originally there was a desire to simply replace the servers and keep doing things the same way. Steve's guidance and knowledge meant that Jenny and the team were pushed to think into the future and identify what we could want to do, this meant that we implemented a system that futureproofs our organisation.

**- JANE BLACK, GENERAL MANAGER
THE CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT STUDIES**

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This future proofing was provided by the recommendation to move to a cloud-based Modern Workplace with Microsoft 365. Based on the plans of the organisation, the volume of data and files within CIS, and the importance of easy accessibility and security, the decision was relatively easy to make.

With a clear implementation plan established, IT Smart Solutions worked with CIS to ensure all staff understood what was going to happen, when and why.

“IT Smart Solutions were very good at ensuring the whole organisation were kept in the loop. They took time to explain the process and address questions and concerns raised by staff,” says Jane.

However, as expected with any major change, some CIS employees were hesitant to embrace the Modern Workplace and were concerned about losing the servers and having onsite support. IT Smart Solutions worked with these team members to ensure they were as well prepared as they could be.

Microsoft Modern Workplace delivers flexible and affordable solution

With the planning phase complete, IT Smart Solutions migrated CIS’ infrastructure to the cloud, starting with shifting 53 mailboxes to Exchange Online and all files into SharePoint.

As a final step of the migration, IT Smart Solutions decommissioned the on-premise servers. The implementation took approximately three months from planning, through adoption until all employees were operating smoothly.

“ I would say from the start of the process until everything was running smoothly was probably about 3 months. There was a lot of learning for both parties. We have a lot of research files and data so there was a huge volume of IP to move into the cloud. Our staff also needed to learn how to use the MSP support offered by IT Smart Solutions, and build a rapport with their team.

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**- JANE BLACK, GENERAL MANAGER
THE CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT STUDIES**

CIS avoids catastrophe thanks to new approach to workplace

With Microsoft 365 deployed, CIS have been able to embrace new functionality including Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA), to strengthen their security. Staff have established a productive working relationship with IT Smart Solutions.

With the solution operating seamlessly, IT Smart Solutions turned their attention to the hardware in use at CIS. After conducting a full review, they recommended upgrading key equipment to ensure it was compatible with the new Modern Workplace technology.

With CIS switching to a fully cloud-based solution, the organisation was well prepared when disaster hit in February 2020. Heavy rains led to the office flooding, destroying nearly all of the onsite hardware and rendering the premises unusable.

Had CIS still relied on physical servers, this incident would have had serious ramifications. However, because of the shift to Modern Workplace, staff were able to access critical information remotely and maintain business as usual.

“ Although we lost a lot of hardware, due to water damage, we were able to get that replaced with our insurance and IT Smart Solutions managed the whole process for us. Having our hardware and software all managed by IT Smart Solutions, really alleviated the stress for us and they were able to keep us operational.

**- JANE BLACK, GENERAL MANAGER
THE CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT STUDIES**

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Following the floods, like so many businesses, CIS was subsequently impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was the resulting move to remote working which prompted CIS to maximise the productivity benefits of the Modern Workplace, using Microsoft Teams and SharePoint to improve collaboration and communication.

“ Since COVID-19 we have noticed a shift in our workplace culture. More of our employees are choosing to work from home and we have been able to provide this increased mobility. We simply wouldn't have been able to do it without the Modern Workplace technologies. Our employees are very happy with the changes and Microsoft 365 has helped them embrace flexible working solutions.

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**- JANE BLACK, GENERAL MANAGER
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In addition to the productivity, security and accessibility benefits of the Modern Workplace, there has also been a clear cost benefit to CIS. This is particularly important for a not-for-profit, where all costs need to be justified to the Board.

Plans for the future

Currently IT Smart Solutions provide the CIS' strategy and support but according to Jane there is more in the pipeline from a technology perspective, including modernisation of the CIS website, CRM and accounting software.

Words of advice

Jane says the key to getting the best value from a new cloud environment is to be clear on what it is you want now and in the coming years, why you want it, and to take the time to go into detail.

"I would recommend making sure you take the time to get to know the people you are working with and being patient as they get to know you. If you allow them the time to understand how your organisation operates, they will be best placed to recommend the most appropriate solution for you now and into the future," says Jane.

IT Smart Solutions specialise in providing small to medium businesses and not-for-profits with the right IT solution. If you need support or guidance with your IT and want to work with a local and passionate MSP, contact us today.



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