



Switchshop sorts out storage so Oldham Sixth Form College can focus on exceptional education

Part of the Pinnacle Learning Trust, Oldham Sixth Form College (OSFC) is a further education college in Oldham, Greater Manchester. Opened in 1992 as a specialist centre for advanced-level study, the college offers students access to a huge range of courses, including over 60 A levels, vocational diplomas and T-Level qualifications. OSFC takes on nearly 1,200 students each year, the majority of which have just completed compulsory secondary education.

OSFC's ambition is to be the post-16 education provider of choice for young people in Oldham and for miles around. The college realised that the achievement of this ambition is only possible if it is supported by effective, fit-for-purpose technology.

OSFC reached a crossroads when they identified a need for extra storage capacity. They did not want to invest too much in their existing legacy infrastructure as it would not provide what they needed in the long term.

Switchshop has been working closely with the college since 2016. OSFC decided to leverage this trusted working relationship to find the right solution to provide the storage they needed for future growth.

The existing challenge: creaky legacy infrastructure

OSFC put together a shopping list for their new solution based on the shortcomings of their existing system. Switchshop was tasked with a storage install that is completely secure, reliable, fast, resilient, able to manage data growth across the business and extremely flexible.

"We found the perfect fit with this solution – it ticks all our boxes, and more. After six months, we haven't had a single incident and we are still extremely satisfied, even though we are no longer in the honeymoon period of admiring all our shiny new equipment!"

Andy Woods Head of Trust IT,
The Pinnacle Learning Trust

The college described their frustration with not being able to restore files directly to where they wanted them from a backup. Files had to be restored to another location and then copied back into the user's location.



The solution: futureproofing simplified

Switchshop started the process of delivering the high availability that the college wanted a few years ago. Originally, they sold OSFC HPE core switches to replace their old ones. As the years went on, Switchshop duplicated these core switches into what was to become their secondary server room. This started the journey of ensuring that the right infrastructure was in place for the storage installation.

Second-generation agility

As a decade-long HPE Gold Partner, Switchshop was able to identify the best solution to meet the needs of the college. Their recommendation was for HPE Nimble Storage dHCI, HPE's second-generation HCI solution.

By disaggregating storage and compute, HPE has improved on the simplicity and power of first-generation HCI by adding the ability to scale storage and compute resources independently. The solution includes HPE InfoSight predictive analytics, with AI-powered self-monitoring, self-healing, and self-optimising capabilities to free IT talent and time from the burdens of routine maintenance and troubleshooting.

In support of uninterrupted education

Education is one of Switchshop's key focus industries. Thanks to years of experience putting IT infrastructure into learning environments, Switchshop was aware that the college could not afford downtime as a result of the switch between the old solution and the new one.

"We engineered a graceful migration between the products by building the new solution alongside the existing one. In this way, we were able to keep both systems running while we migrated what we needed from the old system into the new one. This ensured that the transition was smooth and seamless for the college," explains Switchshop Senior Account Manager, Leon Hyde.

Defeating ransomware

"Working with Switchshop gives us a high level of comfort – they pull out all the stops to get you up and running. They ensure that you are left with a working solution that does everything that they promised."

Andy Woods Head of Trust IT,
The Pinnacle Learning Trust

“With the recent announcements from NCSC highlighting an increase in ransomware attacks on the UK education sector, we understand that security is of paramount importance to OSFC. We used HPE Nimble Storage to mitigate the significant vulnerability to ransomware,” says Hyde.

“If there is a ransomware attack, HPE’s snapshot-based backup recovery is faster and more efficient than a typical recovery for a ransomware event: it enables a near-instantaneous restore.”

Security without fail

“We’ve gone from having a single backup copy of all our systems to four – this ensures that we will never be faced with a data disaster from which we cannot recover,” comments Andy Woods, Head of Trust IT.

“This install has cemented an effective disaster recovery plan for the college. Every night, the primary location synchronises a complete copy of all our servers (in a mutable format) to our secondary site, which is a five-minute walk away. We have complete peace of mind that our data is secure.”

The benefits: Ease of management under a single pane of glass

A cost-effective solution

Woods describes how this solution has futureproofed their infrastructure. “This solution came in on budget, and this allowed us to specify ample headroom to cover the college in case we experience a sudden increase in data requirements, or we need to spin up extra servers.

“From pre-sales to implementation, the Switchshop team are professional and always top of their game. The solution just works and the overall process turned out to be much less complex than we anticipated,” Woods concludes.



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