Ademco breaks barriers with cloud computing

With the support of Ademco Security's cloud computing backend, Resorts World Sentosa is able to benefit from its integrated security management platform sooner than expected

By Emily Chia

ADEMCO SECURITY GROUP managing director Toby Koh is excited about its current Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) project. The Ademco team is implementing a fully integrated access control and intrusion detection system for the Integrated Resort (IR). A one-card integrated security management platform helps to ensure the resort's 18,000 employees use the same card for logging in and out of the system. The implementation, which started in February last year, would be completed at the end of the third quarter this year.

Ademco Security Group has been delivering integrated and comprehensive electronic security, fire detection and monitoring systems to more than 5000 institutional, commercial and government clients across Asia for more than three decades. Incorporated in Singapore, it has an annual turnover of US$14.1 million, a staff strength of more than 300 personnel in Singapore, and a regional footprint that extends across Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, China and Vietnam.

Infrastructure rethink

Ademco created the software needed to integrate the security hardware with RWS' backend solutions. His team of 16 in-house employees and 100 external contractors are S$309 million project.

"Traditionally, security systems are not integrated. Now more forward-looking organizations, such as RWS, are integrating their systems."

He observed that in this area of security, Asian organizations are not as progressive as US and European companies.

"Up to 90% of Fortune 500 companies have their security platform integrated, including access control, close circuit TV and intrusion detection systems. They also integrate their backend, such as payroll, with the security systems."

In comparison, only 10-15% of Asian companies are at this stage of security awareness, he estimated. However, he believes this percentage will increase steadily as Asian companies that are expanding regionally and globally start to struggle with cross border asset protection.

Koh believes his cloud computing infrastructure played a key role in the success of the RWS implementation. Previously Ademco had

to juggle with many legacy systems.

The RWS project was not only massive but challenging to execute on a fast track schedule, said Koh. According to him, a project of this nature would typically have an implementation period of 12 to 24 months.

"We were coordinating works with three main contractors, architects, M&E consultants, security consultants, dozens of sub-contractors, not to mention the client. Cloud computing allowed us the mobility and connectivity as our projects team were scattered across the large site."

Cloud breakthrough

Supported by the cloud platform, coordination, tight project management and having the entire project team as well as the support team back in the office all centered on the same live data was possible.

Ademco's Koh: My focus is empowering my staff with the tools to make the right decisions when they need them

"We were running standalone sales automation, customer service and service tracking software on our premises. About two years ago, I felt that there must be a better way to move forward."

At that time, cloud computing did not have today's fervors, he reflected.

A few reasons made him excited about cloud computing. He was looking for a way to reinvent the backend to make it more efficient. Koh wanted to have one platform for everyone but did not want to have the whole IT department run it, especially since there was already a team running its 24/7 Central Alarms Monitoring Center that focuses on fire alarm monitoring.

"My focus was empowering my staff with the tools to make the right decisions when they need them. Cloud computing promised the ease of deployment from pre-sales opportunity management, Google and Yahoo search engine integration to tracking service standard, scheduling and automated client satisfaction survey."

Selection criteria

He took two months to evaluate cloud computing solutions. Availability was a key consideration. Ademco tested out the availability of cloud computing solutions with a 3G wireless modem on a laptop and Koh was satisfied with its consistency.

As he had plans to expand regionally to China, Malaysia and Philippines, he was also concerned about the scalability of the cloud computing solutions.

"Our existing system restricted our expansion plans as it required us to physically install the client software solutions in our regional staff's laptops."

With that system, the implementation risks were too high as many things were not within Ademco's control, said Koh.

Tips to cloud computing integration

1. Be clear about the end objectives. In our case, within two months, our objectives changed with the input that the team came up with, in terms of what was realistic and do-able.

2. Choose a good and experienced integrator who is committed to the implementation outcome. The first one we worked with did not deliver as promised. On hindsight, we did not do a good job at qualifying them. Thus, when they lost some headcounts, they could not cope with the new projects that came onboard.

3. Get the team's buy-in. Planning and strategizing the implementation is important. We were fortunate that the project team was driven and its enthusiasm was infectious.

Source: *Ademco Security Group*

He remembered the time his engineer went to India to implement a system and it flooded. There was little he could do about it. That was when he recognized that his client server architecture may not be the best option moving forward.

"We needed to be able to customize our software to meet our clients' processes. In cases where the offices are not in Singapore, we needed to be able to maintain control and ensure that the processes are fulfilled to maintain service levels."

Cloud computing met his requirements.

Automation is key

Today, Ademco has achieved paperless processes. All engineers have laptops with mobile broadband connectivity. Service reports are emailed to customers and respective internal departments automatically.

"Duplicate copies are a thing of the past. We used to have two service clerks keying in the entries. They have since been deployed to do higher-level work."

Automation has relieved staff from mundane work, helping to boost morale and allowing staff to expand their skillsets, he observed.

In addition, cloud computing allows Ademco to keep its knowledge base in-house. One of the criteria for selecting cloud computing was

whether the team could access all the right information to do their job.

"There are instances where employees may need a copy of the manual for products that they are less familiar with. Previously, they would either pick a copy up from the office or ring a colleague who was more familiar. What a waste of time!"

Today, they can refer to the manual online. The respective product manager maintains the information so anyone accessing it via the cloud would know that it is the most updated copy.

Since late last year, Ademco has been using Salesforce's Chatter to track discussions, documents and service requests.

"It is more efficient. Whenever there were changes, we would be able to see them. It was certainly more effective than sending PDFs via emails."

On hindsight, he said the biggest implementation challenge was lobbying employees. His personal assistant stepped up to be the project champion. He also pulled together a team of senior persons from each department who already thought cloud computing was a good idea. Then he got two to three people from each department to try out the solutions. They liked the experience and preached the benefits to the rest of the team. *EI*

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