case study: leveraging technology to accommodate growth

helping worldstrides get more from their IT investments

results at a glance:

- Eliminated connectivity and networking issues resulting in improved remote worker productivity.
- Move to collocation center and virtualization reduced the number of servers from 77 to 5 saving significant expenditures on refreshing and maintaining hardware.
- Migrated workforce from earlier version to Exchange 2010.
- Reduction in the number of custom applications has saved in support requirements.
- Outsourced Help Desk has increased user satisfaction and enhanced staff performance.

client profile:

WorldStrides, headquartered in Charlottesville, VA, is the nation's largest student travel organization. Since 1967, over 4 million elementary, middle, high school, and college students have participated in one of the firm's educational travel programs. The firm operates three divisions with tailored programs based on the student's grade level and interests. With annual revenues of approximately $400 million, WorldStrides has experienced strong organic growth as well as growth through acquisitions.

business problem:

Technology is central to the firm's ability to accommodate growth. As WorldStrides grew, so too did the demands on the firm's IT functions. In many areas, IT performance was solid. Hardware had been standardized and aging servers had been replaced. Risks from security breaches or catastrophic failure had been minimized. Many of their IT policies and procedures had been documented. However, some common issues associated with rapid growth began to arise. Operational problems tolerable in a slower growth or less technology-dependent environment were now more problematic.

A number of fundamental matters were now causing concern. Connectivity and networking issues were hampering the business, costing revenue by restraining productivity. Nearly 400 Customized General Information Services (GIS) programs were costly to support and maintain. The internal Help Desk wasn't fulfilling users' demands. Their availability was limited and frequent requests for help languished as determining priorities was unclear.

Remote access for the 175 salespeople and account managers had become critical to acquiring new business and keeping current customers happy. Many more employees now needed access to applications and data from their home offices

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or from the field. Providing the resources for straightforward and reliable connectivity was a challenge.

The firm had deployed 77 servers, which required significant internal resources to operate and maintain. With so many servers they were prone to technical challenges and inefficiency (for example, there were 14 Citrix servers, and the firm's Microsoft Exchange server had limited storage space due to disk size and the version of the software).

IT governance needed to be formalized and strengthened. Too much time and energy was devoted to short-term matters and more attention needed to be paid to longer-term strategic issues. The bottom line was that IT's support of the firm's technology needs was good and predominately reactive — but to accommodate growth and keep pace with users' demands their performance was going to have to be preemptive and go from good to great.

from good to great — one step at a time
WorldStrides had an established relationship with Randstad Technologies dating back to 2006. It was then that Randstad Technologies had performed an IT assessment for the firm. Applying a process and tools developed and refined over years of performing similar studies, its approach is both descriptive and prescriptive. The assessment findings were wide-ranging and insightful. It identified both prominent and more obscure IT problems and issues.

Three years later, many of the recommendations made in the assessment had been implemented. The IT department had been reorganized and the former director of applications development was promoted and replaced the prior CIO. Slowly WorldStrides had addressed many of its shortcomings and by 2009, the positive impact of these endeavors was apparent to management and staff.

In 2007 Randstad Technologies was engaged to stabilize and improve the IT infrastructure and operations. The new WorldStrides CIO and Randstad Technologies collaborated to assess the progress they had made and map out future steps. Working together Randstad Technologies and World Strides assembled a team from both firms that brought together the talents and experience WorldStrides needed to continue to move forward. Every year the team made incremental improvements enhancing WorldStrides' IT operations, reliability, and stability.

To address users' concerns about the timeliness and effectiveness of support, WorldStrides outsourced their help desk to Randstad Technologies. The help desk now has the depth of personnel and knowledge to triage problems and quickly respond to users' issues. Today the help desk is available 24/7 allowing remote workers, regardless of their location and time zone, access to assistance. Users have been pleased with the improved level of support, resulting in increased overall end user satisfaction.

To centralize administrative tasks, enhance scalability, and more effectively utilize their hardware and other resources, WorldStrides moved to using a co-location center and virtualized their operating environment. They collaborated closely with Randstad Technologies in planning and executing these activities. Remote

offices and workers now have reliable access to the tools they need through the co-location center. Virtualization facilitated the consolidation of the firm's CRM, financial, and operational systems throughout their three divisions. The number of custom GIS software programs was reduced. The acquisition and deployment of a new phone system has resolved earlier connectivity issues.

WorldStrides finds one of the key advantages of working with Randstad Technologies their ability to bring in people with the specific skills they need. According to the WorldStrides' CIO this capability is especially valuable, "when we decided to migrate everyone from Exchange 2003 to Exchange 2010 Randstad Technologies provided some really sharp individuals who were Exchange experts. They quickly assessed what we were attempting to do and made sure we got this effort off on the right step. I like that Randstad Technologies has a deep bench to call on when we need them."

The WorldStrides/Randstad Technologies team has accomplished so much in the past few years their standard of excellence is now a given within the organization. The WorldStrides CIO knew it would take time to meet the high expectations now demanded of them — but he also knew the team they had developed could do it. "We don't even delineate anymore between our internal team members and Randstad Technologies. They are part of our team and are embedded in WorldStrides. They're vested in our success and make sure we have the right people and tools to attain our goals."

the partnership pays off
Moving to a co-location center and creating a virtual environment has created significant cost savings. Instead of maintaining and refreshing nearly 80 servers, WorldStrides now has five. A recent move by the firm into a new headquarters building was extremely easy — there were no servers to move. Employees are better able to work remotely or from their home offices. Reduced space requirements for offices and computer hardware have trimmed office rent expenses. There's a level of redundancy that would be impractical to maintain from both cost and office space perspectives. With remote workers able to work while they're on the road, productivity

has increased. Reducing the number of custom applications reduced support requirements.

Another part of this increase in worker productivity is the outsourced help desk. A more stable architecture has increased reliability - and the availability of around-the-clock help from any location allows users who have problems to get them resolved and return to work faster. When Randstad Technologies first took over the help desk WorldStrides paid close attention to performance metrics. User satisfaction has grown and complaints have diminished to the point that not much attention is devoted to those metrics anymore. Their consistently high level of performance is now accepted as a given.

WorldStrides has raised the level of its game for IT in its users' eyes. System reliability has significantly improved — particularly for remote and home offices. It's now an exception when a user encounters a problem. By working closely together and making incremental improvements each year, the WorldStrides/Randstad Technologies team is now poised to accommodate future demands.

As confidence in IT has grown throughout the organization, its role has grown more strategic. Investments in IT are now more effective in attaining better utilization of resources, higher productivity, and faster response times. There is now more emphasis in being proactive than reactive. IT is now ahead of the curve — rather than behind the 8-ball.

" I've been impressed with the level of commitment Randstad Technologies has devoted to WorldStrides. They act more as if they've got an ownership stake in the company. With them as an integral part of our team we've taken WorldStrides to an unprecedented level of reliability and proficiency. *"*

~WorldStrides CIO

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