

Cloud technology roadmap for Our World Limited

by Rick Felderhof - Managing Director, Our World Limited



A few years ago now, our company Our World operating various brands such as Our Pacific, was an SME of 25 staff specialising in package holidays for Kiwi holidaymakers travelling to the Pacific Islands, Australia, Asia, and international cruising holidays. In an industry totally reliant on technology to deliver the best air & land deals, in the most efficient and cost effective way possible, and with a requirement to be 100% live to our customers all the time, we needed to upgrade from our legacy systems and servers to a new solution.

We canvassed a number of suppliers including our incumbent large scale IT supplier. Our incumbent IT supplier, who knew well our current system and setup and our future needs, prepared a proposal that was simply the Rolls Royce package that was unrealistic for a company of our size and didn't appear to match our needs. The cost was astronomical and we wondered whether the proposal was based on what suited them rather than what was the best fit for us. We also canvassed a number of other telecoms providers who provided a range of packages, some good and some not so good.

We chose to progress with Converge, because they listened to what we needed and took the time to fully understand where we were and where we needed to be. We worked mostly with owner Ali Ebrahim who brought in specialist advice where needed, to design a project plan over a 12 – 18 month period that was cost effective and within our budget, had steps & deliverables along the way that helped minimise risk, and delivered an end result that is currently working live and delivering up to our expectations. To provide full diagnostic services, we retired servers and hardware replacing them with a state-of-the-art router & firewall, a robust switch and UFB provision, allowing Converge to remotely track any problems right through to the end users laptop. Add over this hardware upgrade, a fully digital cloud based Kandy communications system providing our team with the flexibility to work either in a call centre environment in the office or remotely should they wish.

Upgrading your entire system is not a nice place to be – lots of options, lots of costs, lots of risk, and to be honest, we're travel agents and not IT experts. After much preliminary work with Ali we agreed on a plan broken down into mini-stages to reduce risk. Each mini-stage was planned, tested before implementation, then executed followed by more testing before go-live. In preparation for go-live and concurrently while bedding in the new hardware and/or software, we would focus on staff training & familiarisation, modifying work flows if necessary, and finally problem solving – there is a long list to complete and it's not for the faint hearted. However having Ali onsite during these mini-stages helped significantly, with Ali talking over responsibility for getting things working correctly, coordinating with remote specialists as & when required, and generally leaving our team free to focus on the running of our business. The key difference here is that Ali was always available, was always willing to come onsite, always took on the responsibility for getting things working as if our business was his business.

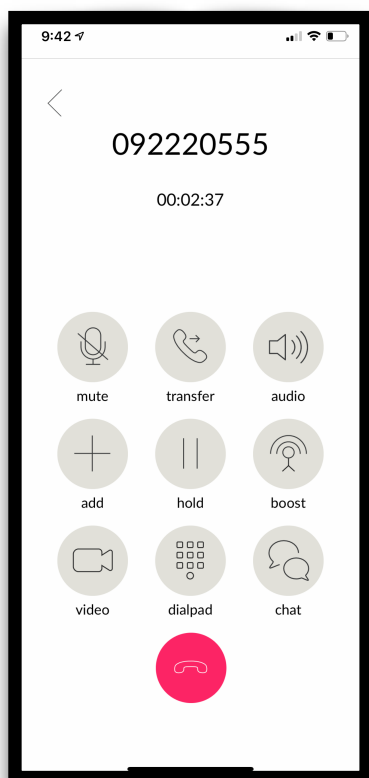
With regards to the cloud based Kandy communications system installed, we did have some initial minor teething issues, but they were largely with our team rather than the system. With staff resistance to change, we chose a gradual adoption approach which gave confidence to our team, helping to consolidate the knowledge transfer to them at every stage along the way. Another thing we noticed was that the technology grasping abilities of our team members were all different. We nominated product champions who led the way and raised the tech levels of the other team members, displaying at each stage that the team was ready to use more and more features of the system. Converges' approach to complement this has always been to respond to any queries as soon as possible – in most cases within minutes with some quick training and/or resolutions to any problems faced with the new technology.

What's also become more & more important to most businesses is fast and stable Internet – with a good price a bonus. As data, voice, video, and screen sharing requirements grow and your business hopefully grows, the need to have the reliability of good Internet is becoming essential. In addition to this if as we have done, is have Converge manage our UFB provision and our router & firewall, so should there be Internet problems then Converge can remote into our system to see where the problem is and focus on getting this fixed asap. Also the provision of backup Internet supply should be considered, especially with all the roadworks taking place and cables being cut, and the ability to have backup options via 4G/5G networks.



Rick Felderhof

The Covid-19 shutdown changed the world as we knew it – following our Kandy communications installation we had continued to work as normal from our office. In late March 2020 with the pandemic building we planned a trial day working remotely, however as we all know things started moving very quickly, and in the end we all made a mad dash to work from home remotely without any trial and with 1 days' notice. Thanks to Converges' cloud based Kandy communications system and the IT systems upgrade they had completed for us, this transition worked 100% seamlessly, and we continue to operate remotely to this day. Hopefully when borders reopen and our business returns to the new normal, we will be using the lessons learned and applying these to our new business and operational model with I am sure some efficiency gains and reduced costs.



SmartOffice mobile app screenshot - All 'Our World' calls are answered and managed on the Android and iOS application.

Overall I can commend and endorse the way owner Ali Ebrahim and Converge approaches his policy of great service, great attitude, great flexibility, great integrity and honesty, and great technology all at a fair & reasonable price – all core attributes that SME businesses in NZ are looking for. We need great technology and we require our technology partners to find new ways of helping us with what we really need. We found that working with our technology partner as we do with Converge, in good and bad situations, builds trust and a strong bond. We know that Converge is constantly looking for the next generation of technology with international vendors that appreciate our skillsets and could help Kiwi businesses progress internationally. We know that Ali loves and is very passionate about what he does and as you will appreciate, technology cannot be treated as a 9 to 5 job – it is a calling from within.

Most SME businesses realise the true nature of larger technology providers after the honeymoon period is over - When things don't work / Account managers change / Management decisions go in a different direction / Lack of flexibility / Have blinkers on with processes / Do not innovate etc. Ali on the other hand has demonstrated he understands SME businesses... his business is one after all. Delivering and servicing Kiwi SME businesses is clearly a market niche that Ali & Converge should focus on to grow their business. As mentioned before, our partnership has grown to the point now where Ali has keys to our premises, allowing me to travel for work or holiday outside Auckland, safe in the knowledge that if I need someone onsite while I am away, Ali or one of the team, will be there asap in an emergency – you won't get that from a big technology provider.

If you are looking for a new roadmap with your technology solutions, I would strongly recommend Ali Ebrahim and his company Converge. I would also encourage you to consider an end-to-end solution providing you with complete IT services and procurement, communications and the next generation of technology. This will help avoid those situations where different providers blame each other and nothing gets resolved, and when it finally does they all send you a bill. Problems do happen, but with "Ali & Converge" when you have one super attentive partner looking after the whole system, they can usually quickly identify where the problem is and get it solved as quickly, efficiently, and the least intrusively as possible.

Happy for you to make contact with me should you require more details at rick@ourworld.travel.

best regards,

Rick Felderhof
Managing Director
Our World Limited

CONVERGE adds...

It was exciting to approach Our World's upgrade because of their complex automated call flows. The challenge was that we were replacing an on premise solution which is undisputedly the best in its class. Rick Felderhof, wanted a technology setup that could primarily facilitate a better work life balance for the team allowing everybody to work remotely among other business goals.

Through the process, we agreed that the business needs to clean up a lot of the technology that was used in the last period and replace it with a cost effective, secure, cloud ready foundation with the right support mechanism behind it. From there, we understood the path ahead for the business and we complimented the business with the right technology tools to help do the job along the way.

The Technology components used to create the solution.

Internet:	Max/Max internet UFB connection Vocus Communications 4G Data connectivity (Internet Failover)
Routing:	Juniper SRX series router with Comprehensive Protection firewall
Switching:	Juniper 48 port switch
Wifi:	Ubiquiti UniFi UAP-AC-PRO
Communications:	Ribbon Communications <u>Kandy business cloud communications solution</u> <u>SmartOffice for Mobile application</u> <u>SmartOffice Collaboration suite</u> <u>Kandy MeetMe Audio Conferencing bridge</u> Kandy Virtual Fax to email Poly <u>Poly VVX 400 series Deskphones</u> <u>Poly Trio 8800</u> <u>Poly Voyager Focus UC</u> <u>Poly Voyager 5200</u>
Support:	Converge Basic Support Plan (included with all technology purchased). Juniper support - Software, Firewall updates including Hardware replacement. Converge Advanced Adoption Plan - communications (AAP).

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