Poulos Bros Seafoods Experiences IT Transformation in Unusual Places

BUSINESS
Australian-based wholesalers, processers, importers and exporters of fresh and frozen seafood.

CHALLENGES
Provide a scalable infrastructure environment to support its ERP system to cope with growth and the rapid pace, 24/7 nature of fresh product distribution.

SOLUTION
Business/IT Transformation, Infrastructure, Managed Cloud, Fanatical Support for Amazon Web Services

OUTCOME
Poulos Bros switched to AWS cloud to ensure their ERP system was optimised to support their busiest periods of the year – Easter and Christmas.

Poulos Bros Seafoods is one of Australia's largest seafood wholesalers, processers, importers and exporters. Established in 1967, Poulos Bros has been family-run for more than 50 years and was one of the first businesses of its kind to computerise seafood distribution in Australia.

As a result of the highly compressed lead times due to the short shelf life of fresh fish products, the business relies on a fast, responsive enterprise resource planning (ERP) system. Poulos Bros' reputation for ensuring customers have access to the best quality produce and availability of stock resulted in IT resources that were strained to meet demand. This was exacerbated by further business acquisitions undertaken by the company. And the existing infrastructure didn't allow Poulos Bros to leverage the online ordering capability within their ERP system, impeding the company as it sought to create an improved customer experience.

Scaling to support the busiest days on the seafood calendar

Poulos Bros had previously tried to support the ERP application responsible for powering its business, but that app was spread across two different infrastructure platforms, and the company had been unable to solve performance issues related to order processing. This meant employees had to process order entries manually, which required more staff so that customer orders were fulfilled on time. These inefficiencies drove administrative costs over budget while preventing the company from meeting its key performance indicators. This also limited Poulos'

ability to scale, especially during extremely busy peak periods like Christmas and Easter, the two busiest trading periods of the year for the seafood industry.

Poulos knew it needed to find a better solution that had the right level of server flexibility and scalability that also allowed them to outsource the technical experience required to migrate and manage the infrastructure supporting their ERP application. They partnered with Rackspace to build an environment in Amazon Web Services (AWS) to address the performance issues they had been experiencing, scale for peak periods and accommodate future acquisitions.

Poulos Bros set out its requirements, which involved a tight deadline to establish a new network for their distribution hubs. All data had to be migrated and all staff trained on the new system prior to Christmas to meet the demands of their busiest week of the year. To prevent the problems of the past from recurring, Rackspace also provisioned a second proof of concept to fully test the new environment – all within the project timeline.

"Rackspace said 'yes' and we scheduled an implementation program to get everything ready within the time constraints," said Peter Poulos, Group Operations Manager at Poulos Bros Seafood.

Poulos continued, "Rackspace was able to determine the plan, and the execution that followed was so easy. When we are getting orders at 10.30 a.m. for seafood in the city in time for lunch, processing orders at speed was our main priority. Rackspace got us there. The

> "WE WERE LOOKING FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN OUR PERFORMANCE BECAUSE THE RESPONSE TIME WAS SO SLOW. JUST TO UPDATE A SINGLE LINE ON AN INVOICE WAS TAKING 12-15 SECONDS. FROM AN OPERATOR'S PERSPECTIVE, THIS IS MORE THAN INFURIATING. IT IS MIND-NUMBING. BUT ABOVE ALL, IT WAS INCREASING OUR ERROR RATES BECAUSE OPERATORS END UP DOUBLE TAPPING, TYPING AHEAD, SO ERROR RATES WERE THROUGH THE ROOF."

PETER POULOS :: GROUP OPERATIONS MANAGER, POULOS BROS SEAFOODS

staff managed the transition comfortably and the project went very smoothly."

Judging success by quiet invisibility

The build from the Rackspace team took two weeks with delivery in late October, which meant Poulos Bros were live for Christmas, their busiest period of the year, with plenty of time to spare to ready their distribution hubs. The performance was so superior to previous years, that their operators had completed all orders by 11 a.m. in the morning.

"An ERP system should operate seamlessly behind the scenes in any business, and with Rackspace provisioning the application onto AWS infrastructure, it now does," said Poulos.

Rather than spending all of its time and resources concerning itself with ensuring critical systems are working optimally to support online ordering, distribution, stock management and forecasting, the team at Poulos Bros now has space and flexibility to think of new enhancements to the system. Poulos said that a huge sign of the success of the project was that people had scope to look for opportunities to enhance and improve, rather than just execute basics.

"HAVING THAT BIGGER BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER PICTURE IN MIND WAS DEFINITELY WHAT MADE THIS AMBITIOUS PROJECT SUCH A SUCCESS, ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE TIGHT DEADLINE WE HAD SET."

PETER POULOS :: GROUP OPERATIONS MANAGER, POULOS BROS SEAFOODS

According to Poulos, "Rackspace asked the right questions and never made a promise they couldn't keep. We didn't want to be locked in to hardware that was inflexible or had an inability to scale up or down, and we also needed something with the least amount of complexity. We wanted the least number of moving parts to our system. Rackspace architected an elegant, simple solution for us and that's when we knew they understood our needs perfectly and were giving us what we needed by listening to our needs."

Delivering great customer experiences now and into the future

With robust networks and servers, Poulos Bros now has a process for customer ordering that they can be confident about.

"Customers place orders any time of the day or night," Poulos said. "With our new online ordering system, we have no need to transcribe orders from voicemail or email, which gives our customers absolute confidence in the accuracy and speed of orders they make with us."

Poulos has advice for those thinking about their own transformation journey. He said, "When looking at transforming your business, it's vital you surround yourself with the right experts who understand and own what you are trying to achieve. Being able to partner with organisations like Rackspace, who not only understand and can fix your IT challenges but have a broader view of the issues you are facing on the ground, is absolutely vital if you want to thrive in the digital and customer–focused era."