

Case Study

nonprofit

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Preservation of Affordable Housing

Ricoh Helps Housing Nonprofit's IT Infrastructure Achieve Standardization, Stability and Accessibility

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— Brad Blake
Vice President of IT
Preservation of Affordable
Housing (POAH)
Boston, Massachusetts



ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

For the Boston-based nonprofit Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH), the mission throughout its 15-year history has been to preserve and create affordable rental housing for low and moderate income individuals, seniors and families. As owner and operator of nearly 9,000 affordable homes in nine states and the District of Columbia, POAH is dedicated to revitalizing individual properties and coordinating neighborhood-scale transformation efforts.

POAH often takes on complex problems that others have deemed insurmountable. By enlisting expertise and creativity, the nonprofit turns dreams of affordable housing into reality for its residents—while satisfying the interests of its owners, funders, public agencies and other stakeholders.

CHALLENGE

In the nonprofit world, it's common to find there's no dedicated IT staff members or leaders on board managing the strategy, direction and operation of IT within the organization. When on-site staff is in place, it is generally a reactive role of putting out fires rather than addressing issues at a higher level. This impacts the organization's ability to keep pace with technology and maintain up to date systems.

CHALLENGE

- Persistent IT issues with third-party IT provider
- Aging hardware and software
- No on-site or local support
- Compliance and security challenges
- Lack of IT standards

SOLUTION

- Switch to Ricoh for Managed IT, Cloud and Professional Services
- Email migration, compliance-based security, data backup
- Hardware updates, lifecycle replacement process
- Reliable, responsive local support

RESULTS

- Spectacular partnership, SharePoint implementation
- Accessibility to Ricoh executives, long-term vision
- Predictable costs, positive employee experience
- Increased uptime and stability

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Just as typical, IT issues can cause enough internal headaches and productivity challenges that a nonprofit agency eventually turns to outside help. This was the situation with POAH when it realized it needed third-party expertise to keep its employees communicating, collaborating and conducting business across all of their locations.

But things didn't go quite as planned. The vendor they hired didn't have local support in Boston and other locations in the South, Midwest and East Coast where POAH had properties. The email migration was painful and resulted in delays and outages. Cost was also an issue, as is typical with most nonprofits with broad missions and limited budgets.

After migrating to the previous provider, POAH hired Brad Blake as Vice President of IT to evaluate its options.

"I'm always interested in finding a partner, not just a vendor," said Blake. "POAH had hired a vendor."

Blake did consider taking control of the IT infrastructure and building his own data center, but even a small data center didn't make good financial sense. Beyond staffing, a dedicated data center would require additional expenditures such as cooling, backups and fire suppression.

"It costs a lot of money to build and run a data center," said Blake, drawing from his experience as Chief Technology Officer with large Boston healthcare organizations where he was responsible for massive data centers. "Being a smaller nonprofit we are constantly working to control expenses and I couldn't justify asking for half a million dollars a year in additional operating budgets just to run our email and other services."

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Then there was the matter of support. With locations distributed across the East Coast and Mid West, POAH needed a partner that could keep its employees up and running in various locations. Security was also a critical consideration, as Massachusetts has some of the strictest privacy laws in the country regarding the storing, management and retention of personally identifiable information. Additionally, POAH needed other security services such as antivirus updates, spam filtering, and workstation and server patching which needs to be done on regular intervals.

Hardware cost and performance were other issues on Blake's mind. Aging computers—some 10 years old—were still in use and network speeds were slowing down the productivity of the staff. POAH needed a partner to execute the strategy that Blake was responsible for developing to meet all of POAH's IT needs around computer lifecycle management, regular security updates to software and a roadmap to replace hardware as it aged.

Also, many of POAH's employees didn't work in corporate offices. They're in the field—conducting site visits and working remotely on laptops. POAH needed a partner to help support cloud-based solutions to help ensure the employees were able to conduct business anywhere, anytime.

As Blake sifted through previous RFP submissions, Ricoh clearly rose to the top of the stack as a leader in cloud computing services.

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SOLUTION

The partnership began with implementation of a hosted email solution in the cloud, migrating email boxes from the previous vendor in a single weekend. The Ricoh team was comprised of nine people in POAH's Boston office working on computers, reconfiguring Outlook® and making sure email was flowing in.

"I was blown away by the resources Ricoh put toward our email migration," said Blake. "I knew right then we had picked the right partner."

From there, secured, compliance-based archiving and a backup solution was implemented so data would be preserved at a Ricoh data center if a short- or long-term disaster occurred in POAH's Boston office. Ricoh took over managing POAH's active directory and server infrastructure as well as spam filtering, antivirus updates and patching. POAH's hybrid solution also leveraged aspects of the cloud to deliver high availability and access, while POAH continued to run its desktop computers locally.

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Since the relationship began in 2014, POAH and Ricoh has systematically removed all the old hardware and implemented a new lifecycle process to replace devices after five years. Even though POAH is primarily a Microsoft® shop, Ricoh also supports several POAH executives who prefer using Apple® technology.

POAH has so much confidence in Ricoh they recently expanded the partnership. Working together, POAH and Ricoh rolled out a SharePoint® intranet site to improve information sharing and collaboration across the nonprofit.



With SharePoint, POAH's employees have access to a corporate calendar rather than relying on emails to stay informed about new property acquisitions, ribbon cuttings and the like. New departmental pages are in the works and each department will be broken out on the file server to make information easier to find in the field. Employees will also be able to instant message each other, make video calls and share desktops through the software as it is integrated into both the POAH email and Lync® systems hosted by Ricoh.

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"Ricoh has helped us bring a lot of SharePoint's core functionality to the table to drive more collaboration around data sharing and working with each other—rather than being siloed," said Blake.

RESULTS

It's clear that POAH has found the right partner for cloud-based hosted email, improved data security, reliable backup, expert support and hardware management. Much more than a third-party vendor, Ricoh's contribution in IT steering and insight into a broad range of technologies has delivered IT peace of mind to POAH.

Costs are contained and predictable. Systems are running seamlessly. And support is there when POAH needs it, no matter the location.

"In every sense, the relationship with Ricoh has been spectacular," said Blake.

Accessible Executives, Long-term Vision

For day-to-day IT management, POAH relies on its Ricoh team. But the doors are also open to Ricoh executives. For instance, a year into the partnership, Blake asked the executives if they would be willing to buy a new third-party application patching module that he was interested in using, and add it to the portfolio of solutions. Turns out, Ricoh had been interested in this module as well, but no other customers had wanted it.

"Ricoh now has the third-party application patching module and they can offer it to any of their customers," said Blake. "This really speaks to the partnership and relationship we have with Ricoh."

Transparent Costs, Invaluable support

Working with Ricoh has many perks, not the least of which is cost. POAH pays a monthly fee for Ricoh to run the backend systems. They get the bandwidth they need, the security that's required and the ability to connect and collaborate through the cloud.

POAH's employees are equally enamored. There's been a noticeable difference in reliability, support and tools since Ricoh took over.

"In every sense, the relationship with Ricoh has been spectacular."

"The beauty of Ricoh is that everything is included in one nice cost that I pay every month," said Blake. "And we get great feedback from all of our staff whenever they have to deal with Ricoh directly."

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