

Mezzanine Consulting Taps Marketing Success With Intel And Network Integrators

Case Study

Intel® Xeon® processor technology, Intel® Centrino® with vPro™ technology, Intel® Centrino® processor technology

Mezzanine Consulting

Mezzanine is now able to focus on providing businesses with market intelligence and consulting expertise with trouble-free network maintenance and remote manageability powered by Intel.

 	
Challenge	Manage expanding knowledge database, while providing secure mobile solutions for its consultants.
Solution	Intel® Xeon® processor technology, Intel® Centrino® with vPro™ technology, Intel® Centrino® processor technology.

Summary

As a growing business that helps companies understand their customers and effectively market themselves, Mezzanine Consulting needed to leverage new technology in order to manage their expanding knowledge database, while providing secure mobile solutions for their consultants. With Network Integrators of Canada Inc. and Intel, they've set a solid foundation for the future and trouble-free network maintenance thanks to managed services by Network Integrators (NI) and remote manageability with Intel Centrino with vPro technology.

Challenge

Mezzanine Consulting started as a business run by London Ontario's Richard Ivey School of Business. In 2001, Lisa Shepherd saw an opportunity to expand the business, moving from one run by students in the summer to a professionally managed, year-round consulting business. After operating within the school for a few years, growth and market opportunities prompted a move out of the university facility to a new downtown Toronto location.



“We were limiting our growth by being located in London, so I incorporated the business and moved it to Toronto,” says President and CEO Shepherd.

Today the vision for the company is being realized and was recently named one of fastest growing companies by Profit Magazine.

Mezzanine helps organizations grow. The company provides Fortune 1000 and small growth oriented businesses with market intelligence and consulting expertise to help plan and execute effective marketing strategies.

“We focus on technology, health care and financial service industries and provide customized market intelligence,” she says. “While other companies offer customized market intelligence, we take that 30,000 foot view of the industry and tell companies what they can do to take advantage of that intelligence given their specific situations. We make it more tangible.”

Mezzanine Consulting turns market research into tangible and tactical plans that can be implemented either in-house by the client, or by the consultants. “Our overall position in the market is marketing effectiveness. We help companies choose the right tools in the marketing tool box to gain the biggest benefit,” Shepherd explains

Shepherd describes her staff as ‘knowledge workers’, and as a result she is constantly looking for new technologies to not only more effectively utilize their market intelligence knowledge but also make it easy for consultants to be productive. She explains that their “product” is the knowledge they gather about a specific company or industry and how they can use that knowledge to create a competitive advantage. With years of history and experience to draw on, their consultants rely on their database and information to deliver results for their clients.

In the beginning, they used an internal staff member to help keep the wireless network and computers operational. With corporate growth, the individual was finding it too time consuming to manage the increasingly complex network infrastructure.

Troubleshooting was difficult because Mezzanine was running different software on different hardware platforms in different configurations that didn’t work well together, Shepherd explains. And, she says, keeping the server running smoothly was becoming a bit of an issue due to a need for better firewall and antivirus solutions.

“If our server goes down, we can’t work because we’d have no access to the knowledge repository that we need to run our business,” says Shepherd.

Solution

To provide support for the growing business, while adding professional IT management, Mezzanine turned to Network Integrators, a Toronto-based managed services provider. The company gave Mezzanine a blueprint to effectively manage its mission critical data, ensure uptime and provide the remote access that consultants need when working off site.

Network Integrators recently upgraded Mezzanine’s server to a new Dell* server with Quad-Core Intel® Xeon® processor technology. The new technology provides faster access to the knowledge database and corporate information consultants need to help companies effectively market their products and services.

“We are a knowledge worker business so the productivity of our people is critical. Good technology supports that.”

- Lisa Shepherd, President and CEO of Mezzanine Consulting



As a managed service provider, NI also ensures all the antivirus, firewall and back ups are done regularly. And, with remote management access to all of Mezzanine's PCs and executive laptops, NI can troubleshoot many corporate issues without being onsite, often getting consultants back up and running before they even realize there was an issue.

"The pain factor for Mezzanine was access to expertise for complex IT work, such as installation of secure wireless or VPN access," says Eric Risler, NI's Director of Technology. "With a business like Mezzanine, technology is so integrated into their business processes that if something bad happens, it can impact their bottom line."

To provide for mobility, the company has standardized on notebooks with Intel® Centrino® processor technology and Intel® Centrino® with vPro™ technology.

For Shepherd, using NI gives peace of mind. "I need to know that my network is available 24/7," she says. "Outsourcing makes sense because our staff time is better spent elsewhere."

In addition to pro-actively maintaining all computers and the subscriptions required by all the computers are up to date, NI ensures there is technical support available to troubleshoot issues. They can access the servers and hardware as they arise, and can do system restarts remotely if required after business hours to minimize impact on staff.

"It is a great comfort to me to know all the computers are functioning and productive," says Shepherd. "Back ups are done remotely so I don't have to worry about making sure we have an up to date copy of our data off site in the event of an emergency."

Whether relying on server technology to host their mission critical database, for backing up data off site, or the processing power of remotely connected, wireless laptops, NI and Mezzanine both standardize on Intel.

"Intel is the leading chip manufacturer and I trust them," says Risler. "Without knowing a lot in depth about the technology, I look for Intel because I know they are a trusted brand. There's comfort in that."

- Eric Risler, NI's Director of Technology

Key Advantages

In addition to accessing professional expertise to troubleshoot issues, NI president Rob Duxter says Mezzanine is saving time and money by moving their technology support out of house.

Shepherd estimates she is saving about 20 staff hours a month; time which could be used working on client projects.

"It is cost effective for us. We can't afford to have an IT expert on the team but we need the skills to keep our mission critical data safe and always accessible. Outsourcing makes sense for a firm our size," she says.

Shepherd says the investment in hardware and software is worth every penny. She estimates the investment in things like new notebooks to be less than 1% of billable revenue per consultant.

"1% is a reasonable investment in your people," she says, adding that the productivity is critical. "From a business management perspective, productivity is important, but it is also important that we minimize our staff's frustration if their computers can't keep up."

Tapping Into Data From Everywhere

As a consulting business, Mezzanine consultants are often working remotely on client sites or from home offices. Since everyone is armed with a notebook with Intel Centrino processor or Intel Centrino with vPro technology they can access every file easily from wherever they are.

Important databases and proprietary knowledge are accessible in two ways: through VPN connection to the server, as well as having critical data posted to the company's intranet accessible online.

"We refresh notebooks every 2 to 2.5 years to make sure we have the fastest possible computers," says Shepherd, who believes it's important to provide staff with all the functionality they need, in a form factor that never has them waiting. "We don't produce a tangible product. We sell expertise and we need instant access to that expertise."

Accessibility of proprietary data from the server and the intranet is a huge leap forward for the company, notes Shepherd who recalls that less than a year ago, their corporate knowledge database was housed in an unwieldy spreadsheet. It's now coded for the web to make it more dynamic and easier to search.

vPro Technology Makes Maintenance Easy

In a move to ease maintenance and updates to their notebooks, Shepherd recently upgraded to a notebook powered by Intel Centrino with vPro technology. Risler explains that this new Intel technology specifically for business PCs allows NI to remotely troubleshoot or update Shepherd's system without the need for the computer to be powered on and online.

"It is a huge potential advantage for Mezzanine. We don't have to be on site to fix a problem or update a system. And, we can do it whether the operating system has booted up the computer or not," he says.

Intel® Centrino® with vPro™ technology combines remote manageability with enhanced security features to create a more powerful and reliable mobile platform for business. In addition, the battery life is extended allowing Shepherd to work longer without being tethered to a power outlet.

"Definitely battery life is a very big deal for us," notes Shepherd. "We do a lot of moving around with our computers and it's good not to worry about where to plug in when working together in the boardroom."

Duxter adds that the remote management of computer systems, enabled both by software applications and processor technology like Intel Centrino with vPro technology saves money for both NI and Mezzanine. "We save on travel time and expenses, which, with the price of gas is a huge saving for us and our clients," he says. "We can pass those savings on to customers, and deliver immediate support remotely."

Integrated Software Solutions Add Efficiency

For internal efficiency, Mezzanine uses best of breed software to address specific business needs. For CRM, they've standardized on Salesforce.com*, accessible through a software as a service (SaaS) model and available online 24/7.

"The SaaS solution for CRM has been fantastic," Shepherd says. "It streamlines communication, improves efficiency and allows us to manage information, coordinate activities, and track customers more easily."

To manage their time and tasks, they use Intervals*, a web-based service that combines time tracking and task management on a personalized online space. Intervals helps to highlight what staff are working on and how long it's taking. This system allows Mezzanine to track in real time how busy consultants are, where there are overlapping deadlines and, according to Shepherd, keeps her in the loop of what is going on operationally.

For more information on
Intel® Centrino® with vPro™ technology, visit www.intel.com/products/centrino/vpro
Intel® Xeon® processors, visit www.intel.com/go/xeon
Intel® Centrino® processors, visit www.intel.com/products/centrino

"We can see utilization and plan better," adds Shepherd. "We have chosen the best software for specific needs. We are willing to choose multiple vendors to get the best results," notes Shepherd.

Future Uses

Marketing has changed dramatically over the past years and Shepherd expects technology to continue to play an important role in helping business maximize marketing dollars.

"For things that are core to our business, we want to be at the leading edge," she says, noting they will implement new technologies that are gaining popularity such as blogging, podcasts and is looking into the use of wiki technology to increase information sharing within and outside their organization.

NI will continue to work with Mezzanine to ensure their technology is addressing business needs. Whether that means improving business continuity and disaster recovery to the real-time data back-up, or adding more processing power, NI sees advances in virtualization made possible with Intel technology benefitting growing businesses like Mezzanine because they maximize computing power within their server at a cost lower than before. It will also allow companies to run multiple environments as needed without costly server purchases, notes Risler.

Shepherd is also planning for further growth for the business, firstly within the GTA where there is a growing demand, and later across Canada and the United States. As the company continues to expand, remote access to knowledge within their database, as well as management tools to keep teams on track will become increasingly important.

"We have a real opportunity to grow in our own backyard. The marketing role is changing rapidly and there is a real demand for our services," she says.

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