MENTONE GIRLS' GRAMMAR FUTURE-PROOFS ITS IT INFRASTRUCTURE

WITH A SHIFT TO THE CLOUD

CUSTOMER PROFILE

Mentone Girls' Grammar School is an independent, single-campus day school for girls, located in the Melbourne suburb of Mentone. Established in 1899, it caters for around 800 students, from three-year-olds in its Early Learning Centre through to those in Year 12.

CHALLENGES

With its ever-increasing technology requirements managed and supported by a small IT team, the school wanted to future-proof its IT infrastructure. To ensure its systems remained reliable and secure, the school needed to migrate from on-premise servers to a cloud solution during the pandemic.

SOLUTION

- Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) via Somerville's private cloud providing compute and other IT resources on demand.
- Storage as a Service (STaaS) for online storage on demand
- Backup as a Service (BaaS) for Office 365 backup and recovery.

BENEFITS

- On-demand scalability, without large capital expenditure
- Operational reliability
- Business continuity
- 24x7 availability of Somerville experts
- Flexibility and ease of IT management
- Peace of mind

Mentone Girls' Grammar School has long been at the forefront of using technology to enhance its state-of-the-art teaching facilities and students' learning experience. However, with its ever-increasing technology requirements managed and supported by a small IT team, the school realised it needed to future-proof its IT infrastructure.

The school's Team Leader of Information Technology, Marie Lunt, is responsible for everything from the school's hardware, software and cloud systems to the telephony system and laptops used by teachers and students. She and her team also assist teachers with the school's learning management system (LMS), and support ancillary devices such as internet protocol (IP) cameras.

While she reports to the school's director of business operations, Marie also deals directly with many other stakeholders, including teachers, students, staff, and parents.

Given IT's increasingly important role at the school, Marie wanted to make sure its systems remained reliable and secure, while being capable of scaling to support future needs. The solution, she realised, was to migrate from on-premise servers to a cloud or as-a-service solution.

Marie canvassed several vendors before deciding on Somerville's Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) private cloud solution for its servers and storage. At the same time, the school moved to Somerville's Backup as a Service (BaaS) for Office 365 solution.

Mentone Girls' Grammar had been a Somerville customer for almost a decade, first with a broadband rollout and then with device deployment.

That history was one key reason for selecting Somerville for the infrastructure migration. "The most important factor for me is having trust in the engineers that are looking after our systems – knowing that they are security conscious and have the level of expertise we need," Marie said.

BUILDING TRUST
WITH AN AMBITIOUS ROLLOUT

In fact, the school had recognised the need for the infrastructure migration for some time. The need to upgrade on premise critical servers offered an opportunity to review our key data storage locations and examine our ICT business continuity solutions.

Then came COVID-19, and IT managers in schools everywhere faced the daunting prospect of supporting students through online platforms. This added a whole new level of difficulty and urgency to Mentone Girls' Grammar's infrastructure project. However, the school was already researching how to best upgrade the school's IT infrastructure and optimise its remote learning capabilities.

Migrating the school's IT infrastructure of 45 VMs to a cloud-based solution and upgrade the existing onsite servers was an ambitious undertaking during a challenging time.

"It wasn't easy to roll out the project during COVID-19, but it made the school's management team more focused on the urgency, so in some ways the pandemic helped push the project through," she said.

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> **- Marie Lunt, Team Leader of Information Technology, Mentone Girls' Grammar**

Despite the challenges, the project took just six months to complete. That was greatly helped by the Somerville team, according to Marie. "Implementation was pretty straightforward. They listened to our requirements and understood what we wanted straight away," she said.

"One key difference I found when researching other IaaS providers was that migration could have taken a lot longer if we chose an architecture with diverse platforms. But with Somerville, once we started the migration, it was quick."

Another reason for choosing Somerville was its support for existing technologies that Marie and her team were familiar with. For example, the new IaaS solution has the same VMware server virtualisation platform that was used with the school's on-premise servers. That resulted in a much quicker rollout and Marie's team requiring far less reskilling than migrating to another platform.

The switch to Somerville's BaaS was similarly smooth. The school had used Amazon Web Services (AWS) S3 as its Office 365 cloud backup solution for some time, so it made sense to use Somerville's AWS S3-based BaaS.

"Being able to continue to use a familiar virtualisation platform minimised the complexity and time during the migration," Marie said.

Importantly, Somerville helped ensure that the school's communications remained fully functional throughout implementation so that the main onsite services were not interrupted.

The school's data is also now largely in the cloud, using Somerville's Storage as a Service (STaaS). So, aside from some services such as phone systems, the school's on-premise footprint is now quite small.

The migration has built further trust between the two organisations. "We've progressed from Somerville providing device deployment to really helping us with consultation. The relationship with Somerville's engineers is key to me. Usually when I select companies and if I'm not comfortable with their engineers, I tend to look elsewhere. But during this migration, the Somerville engineers assisted me when I needed them most."

"Security" is another term Marie uses often to describe Mentone Girls' Grammar's migration to the cloud — and not only data and system security.

"The greatest security is really having a team of Somerville people available. That has really offloaded pressure to ensure IT services run 24/7 even if I get hit by a bus," Marie explained. "I'm able to take leave and not worry about if something goes down."

Business continuity during and after the migration was a key driver for adopting IaaS, but so was the ability to adapt and scale.

"Unlike with on-premise hardware, being able to scale up and down as needed is another great feature of IaaS," added Marie.

But in the end, the key measure of success for any IT infrastructure is the number and severity of outages.

"Uptime has been at 99% or more," reported Marie. "We typically have local power outages once or twice a year. They would bring down our on-premise servers, but I don't have to worry about that anymore."

The pandemic has made it even more vital that the school's IT services run reliably and smoothly. "With more students and teachers off-site more often, and with applications like an LMS, the expectation that systems will run smoothly is a lot higher than it used to be," she said.

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The IaaS solution has also reduced the workload for Marie's small team. "I can now concentrate on customer-facing tasks with teachers and staff, as well as with my team," said Marie. "If we hadn't deployed IaaS, I would have had to say to the business operations director, 'We need another systems specialist in our team to ensure business continuity'."

EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF STUDENTS

What does the future hold for Mentone Girls' Grammar and its relationship with Somerville?

Marie's main plans revolve around data. "The pandemic's taught us that paper forms just don't work when everyone's trying to work remotely, so we're working towards more online forms, integration with our existing systems, and automation," she said.

Mentone Girls' Grammar has discovered that IaaS, STaaS and BaaS are game-changers that deliver on-demand access to computing power, storage, networking and applications — replacing traditional on-premise infrastructure.

The benefits of the school's partnership with Somerville are many. These start with on-demand flexibility and scaling, making it easy to manage data storage needs, virtual machines and applications — without having to make a significant capital expenditure. There's also greater security, reliability and the ability to upgrade or downgrade services when needed.

Underpinning all this is the on-demand availability of Somerville experts to help maximise the effectiveness of the school's cloud-based capabilities.

In short, Mentone Girls' Grammar's partnership with Somerville enables teachers and students alike to thrive in a digitally connected world, and frees Marie's IT team to focus more on all-important support to end users.