

Xtrac Gears Up for a High Performance Future

ISN helps Xtrac operate smarter and faster with an IT infrastructure modernisation programme architected for agility, innovation, resilience, and growth

About Xtrac

Based in Berkshire in the UK and Indiana and North Carolina in the US, Xtrac is a prominent ambassador for the UK's world-renowned motorsport industry. Established in 1984, the company today employs almost 400 highly qualified staff supplying world-class transmission and driveline products including gearboxes, differentials and gearchange systems. It exports 70 per cent of its manufacturing output to Asia, Australia, Europe, South America and the US.

In 2017 the company was subject to a successful buyout by UK-based Inflexion Private Equity, supporting the senior management team and the Employee Benefit Trust. Xtrac's award-winning Employee Benefit Trust was established in 1997 when then managing director Peter Digby led an inspiring management buyout that included all employees.

Xtrac works mainly with the high-performance automotive sector alongside its traditional heartland of the motorsport industry. The company aligns with the UK government's Industrial Strategy and Automotive Council agenda on lightweight transmission systems for net-zero emission vehicles. Customers of its high-performance automotive and motorsport business sectors rely on its specialist expertise, augmented by the company's substantial investment in research and innovation, as well as advanced design, engineering and manufacturing resources.

With plans to aggressively expand its coverage of the high performance hybrid and electric car transmission market, Xtrac wanted to overhaul its traditional on-premises IT infrastructure, initiating a more flexible and modern environment that would fuel future growth.

The challenge

New channels to market, an expanded manufacturing environment, and the transition to new digital co-creation capabilities meant Xtrac needed to transform its systems for maximum reliability, compliance, and security posture suitable for the markets and growth ahead.

"Over the years, our IT infrastructure had evolved in a piecemeal fashion – and not with a growth or agility strategy in mind," explains Neil Randon, CIO at Xtrac. "Added to which, the rapid digitalisation of business in the wake of Covid-19 meant we had to address a raft of new cyber security, collaboration, and productivity needs."

Enabling a highly secure, highly connected, highly resilient, and agile IT environment capable of supporting the fast-evolving requirements of a rapidly expanding global customer base was a must have. However, with just a small in-house IT team, Xtrac needed to work with a trusted partner that could help it undertake an ambitious modernisation programme in a highly structured and modular way.



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The solution

As a long-standing managed service and support partner, ISN was selected to help Xtrac define and implement its new IT strategy. By leveraging ISN's expertise in multiple disciplines and technology arenas, Xtrac would be working with a single partner that had a deep understanding of its business operations.

"To help shape our future IT strategy, we held a series of workshops to explore the 'art of the possible'. ISN led the tech briefings, covering everything from when and where to use cloud, to ways to improve the performance of our key systems," continues Neil Randon.

Getting the design foundations right for the new infrastructure would be critical for achieving some crucial target outcomes: maximising the availability, efficiency, and reliability of Xtrac's engineering and manufacturing systems and services. As a round-the-clock business serving a global customer base, a bullet-proof disaster recovery strategy was also a top requirement.

"We asked ISN to challenge our thinking – and they certainly did that," confirms Mike Gooding, Head of IT at Xtrac. "As well as helping us re-envision our back-end systems, they also encouraged us to explore new technologies and delivery models, that could help us get products to market faster."

Having defined a high-level infrastructure modernisation plan featuring a cloud journey, Office 365, data security, and new connectivity and platforms to support the ever increasing design and manufacturing capabilities, Xtrac prepared to embark on a journey that would see it undertake a massive upgrade of all its systems.

"While we've retained design authority over the modernisation programme, ISN is ultimately responsible for its execution – and they do it a lot better than we could"

- Neil Randon, CIO at Xtrac

Building a stronger IT foundation and IT operations

To unlock business value fast, ISN began with initiating Microsoft 365 and modernising active directory across the site to enable teams to quickly switch to remote working anytime, anywhere. Supported by a modern endpoint security and protection model, complete with two-factor authentication to support digital security needs, this transformational move ensured that engineering teams were able to remain productive throughout the pandemic; including a team of over 80 Engineering Designers that were traditionally 100% on-prem power users due to their architecture and bandwidth demands.

In parallel, to ensure its US operations could maintain reliable and continuous access to business-critical systems hosted in the UK, ISN implemented a WAN that delivers seamless access to applications with no sacrifice to security and much improved performance.



"These two actions alone helped ensure we're able to maintain business continuity without interruption, while enabling our people to become more effective at collaborating and improving productivity," states Neil.

ISN was also responsible for implementing a private cloud, housing business critical infrastructure for Xtrac's new engineering, that would eliminate a lot of legacy risk from its previous on-prem environment. Alongside creating the brand new resilient and protected infrastructure, ISN also supported the migration of those core systems in a way that assured business continuity throughout the build, test, and go-live project stages.

The initial transition to a cloud and VMware based environment was so successful that Xtrac quickly transitioned a second, sizeable core business system to the same offsite environment. At the same time, ISN supported Xtrac as it looked to acquire the robust cybersecurity credentials that will prove crucial as it pursues new markets.

“Having achieved our Cyber Essentials accreditation, we’re now on track to achieve full compliance with the ISO/IEC 27001 Information Security Management standard that will demonstrate our ability to assure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information assets,” confirms Neil.

The transformation journey continues apace. Last year, Xtrac completed 34 key IT modernisation milestones that included a major projects such as ERP, CAD and PLM upgrades, and of equal importance, the decommissioning of a number of legacy systems and servers.

“Without ISN, we simply wouldn’t have the resources or manpower needed to successfully undertake and co-ordinate such a significant number of projects in a 12-month timeframe. ISN are able to flex resources up and down, according to our needs – and are on hand to give us lots of options to think about whenever we embark on the next change project,” confirms Mike.

A reliable partnership

Over the years, ISN has become a trusted partner and advisor that plays a key role in enabling Xtrac to execute its fast growth strategy and respond with ease to the changing demands of the automotive markets it serves.

“We don’t just depend on them to find the right solution for our needs whenever we tackle new projects. They are also responsible for the day-to-day running of our highly complex operational environments, ensuring these are stable, reliable, and secure at all times,” says Neil.

“It would be true to say that ISN are our ‘go to’ resource for infrastructure.”

Whether that’s ensuring our engineering and design capabilities are built on the very best platforms and cutting-edge technologies or ensuring that our business-critical networks and data centre resources are primed to work optimally at all times,” says Mike.

“Being such a small team, we rely on our partners a lot more than some would. ISN remotely manages our new environment and monitors the legacy on-prem estate in a highly effective way and are on hand to provide us with the additional on-site manpower we need whenever we undertake specific change projects.”



ISN solution

- Network, systems, and security consultancy
- On-demand support services
- Specialist support for change and migration projects

Benefits

- Instant access to technical experts for change and digital transformation projects
- Specific expertise for empowering IT modernisation programmes and cloud-based IT infrastructure
- Workplace services, security services and application management services that maintain business continuity without interruption
- 24x7 monitoring and support for all environments, including mission-critical systems