

CIO interview Ben Hetherington: B&Q owner Kingfisher flies across Europe in the cloud

Author: Danny Palmer for Computing.co.uk

Date: 2nd August 2013



Kingfisher is Europe's largest DIY retailer with more than 78,000 employees and a heavy UK presence represented by more than 350 B&Q stores across the country. A series of different brands across Europe, including French firms Castorama and Brico Dépôt, each had their own IT departments operating in different ways, but now the group is refurbishing its estate so that eventually every outlet across the continent will run on the same systems.

"We haven't completely overhauled everything where all the retailers are on the same system yet, but we're heading in that direction," Ben Hetherington, group service delivery manager for Kingfisher IT Services, told *Computing*.

"What we have been doing is to host more of the group's applications from our UK [datacentres](#), operating to the same standards, putting them on the same platforms and operating systems, supporting applications necessary onto the standards we've chosen.

"There's still some work to do in terms of standardisation, and we're moving people along onto some big programmes that we'll be starting up and running for the next few years to achieve that," he said.

The challenge has been to devise a strategy that will allow the use of shared services across the continent, to replace the separate European and UK set-ups with a common [tool](#). Initially, Kingfisher examined the extension of its UK tools to Europe, but "because it was set up for a single customer", Hetherington explained, "it would have needed to be started from scratch; it would have been a long and expensive project to do that".

It was decided that cloud hosting would have a key role in Kingfisher's IT strategy, and ServiceNow was chosen after impressing during a selection process.

"What was key to us was they were seen as market leaders," said Hetherington. "Some of the other suppliers we looked at, and are used to dealing with, are definitely followers who were unable to give us as clear technological strategy over what they wanted to do in the coming years, whereas ServiceNow came across as experts leading the market and setting up standards for the next few years."

computing

Since selecting ServiceNow at the end of last year, Kingfisher has been working on a two-stage programme, replacing the incumbent tools in the UK in the first stage, and then replacing the European set-up in the second stage of that strategy. The programme is far from complete, but the group has already started seeing benefits.

"We're halfway along the journey at the moment and all we've done really is replace the UK side of it, but it has already given us some benefits in terms of improved functionality. By and large though, the single biggest benefit will be when we've got one single group tool in both locations," said Hetherington. Other benefits already seen through ServiceNow and slimming down to a single system include better scheduling and configuration across the group's shared services.

"We're using the tool in the UK for all our service management processes, but in Europe we are using it for change and configuration. So just having a single tool for change and configuration is helping us; there's some functionality in ServiceNow around the central change calendar that's helping us to schedule our changes better. And when we've got a group run with shared services, that's increasingly important to us," Hetherington explained, adding that there have also been big benefits in self-service and automation in Europe, which will be rolled out across the UK next year.

"In terms of self-service and automation, we recognise there are some big benefits; we recognise and want to get on board with in the UK and get our users to have some automation around their service requests," he said, pointing out that it also brings the added benefits of cost saving and an improved user experience.

"We're looking forward to some big savings on that because it'll automate some things that are happening manually at the moment at service desk level and it'll also give a better user experience, with a lot more automation work. These are tricky processes to get right, manually they can go wrong, so, if we can automate that, I think we can offer a much better experience for users."

In addition, with the aid of ServiceNow, Kingfisher hopes to offer a more up-to-date online shopping functionality.

"We're replacing a text-based service with what will be in ServiceNow a much more modern web shopping experience, and our users are really keen to get on board with it. That will be IT and non-IT functionality involved in that service request."

Link: <http://www.computing.co.uk/ctg/feature/2286461/cio-interview-ben-hetherington-b-q-owner-kingfisher-flies-across-europe-in-the-cloud>