

Strategic consulting helps world-class manufacturer Carbolite reduce risk and gain more value from IT

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Andrew Beare,
Director of Finance,
Carbolite Limited

Overview

Business challenge

- Better understand business needs and IT requirements following a change in ownership.
- Reduce risk in IT services.
- Deliver more value and gain improved control over information systems while maintaining a good relationship with the central IT function.

Solution

- A 15-day consulting engagement focused on delivering value from IT services — reviewing current IT provision, approaches and user experiences resulting in numerous recommendations.
- Revealing potential risks, sharing best practice and presenting opportunities for change.
- Helping align IT with Carbolite's business objectives and operational requirements.

Benefits

- IT approaches moved from being largely reactive to far more focused and proactive.
- Improved skill levels through new hires and knowledge transfer, reducing over-reliance on single key staff and enhancing credibility with central IT function.
- Improved control, effective implementation of new services and processes.
- IT can now deliver and is perceived as delivering greater value to the business and end users.



Case Study

Carbolite designs, manufactures and distributes laboratory and industrial furnaces, ovens and incubators. Worldwide, the name has become a byword for excellence in heat processing equipment. Until 2007 and as part of the Barloworld group, Carbolite used a centralised IT function that structured and delivered services to meet the needs of multiple businesses; this meant the specialist individual requirements of Carbolite were not always fully met. In late 2007, the acquisition of the business by Nova led to a rethink.

“We wanted to explore best practice in IT for a company of our size while continuing to work with group IT,” says Andrew Beare, Director of Finance. “We wanted to find ways to be more flexible, to improve our local knowledge and understand potential business risks—to understand how we could develop our systems and what we’d require for the future, to benchmark against industry best practice compared with our current practices.”

Why BT Engage IT?

“We wanted more focus on IS and to create a more proactive strategy, to better support individual departments, and to develop staff internally. This is why we sought an independent review.” Carbolite engaged BT Engage IT as an expert resource to assess its infrastructure and then map it against current and future needs, taking into account how technology could support greater efficiency and drive future growth. Andrew says, “They had clearly been here before with this type of review, looking at best practice and explaining how you can get there. We were impressed by its business acumen, resources and depth of expertise, while reference sites demonstrated its track record.”

A ‘very professional approach’

“Our goal was to help Carbolite understand its IT services, any limitations and risks, and how technology could best support its future direction,” says Neil Hall, Strategy Consultant, BT Engage IT. This included a detailed examination of the ‘user experience’ covering service reliability and performance, failure management and communications. “We also looked at IT cost visibility, current sourcing and responsibilities, service and operational level agreements, plus skills and training,” Neil adds. Measurable objectives were identified for key areas including cost benefits, service improvements, IT infrastructure change, and governance.

“It was a very professional approach, with Neil spelling it all out in layman’s terms and communicating at every level,” says Andrew Beare. “I was happy putting him in front of all personnel, including our CEO, and received positive feedback from all. This type of input into our local IT was welcomed—we want people to have confidence in our systems. A key issue was “the gap or risk analysis. Both myself as a finance person and our IS project manager needed to understand the risks we faced and the impact on Carbolite if something went down at our central supplier. We developed a far greater understanding of the biggest risk areas, as well as the industry standard and best-in-class approaches.”

The consulting report included practical recommendations for change: from enhancing central line-of-business applications and improved approaches in HR and customer relationship management (CRM) through reducing security risks and enhancing remote access to removing over-reliance on single personnel and suggestions to drive quantifiable service improvements. Proposals were also

included for a best-practice Microsoft platform to support new sales and delivery toolkits.

“We gained a plan to move forward with, the focus we needed, plus immediate quick wins and solutions associated with the risks identified,” Andrew says. “For example, developing a replacement application based on Microsoft .NET/SQL for our Dbase legacy application.” In terms of scope, he says the consulting delivered everything asked of it. “We could present senior management with a comprehensive picture of our current infrastructure, a picture of an industry class goal, and a potential path to get there, with the different options open to us. I understood our structure better, and what IS could do for the business.

“I think we’ll see an improvement in value for money but will need to invest to get there. I think the biggest immediate gain came with recruiting an IS project manager, as recommended, and putting him in a position of seniority. With BT Engage IT’s recommendations and his knowledge we can now engage with our central supplier in a far more credible way. We can see a return on investment already because we can challenge current practices if we run into problems and ask more informed questions about possible solutions.”

Customer profile

Industry: manufacturing – equipment for laboratories, science and industry
Services: design, manufacture & sales of elite chamber, box & tube furnaces plus ovens and incubators.

Carbolite’s head office and manufacturing base is located in the Hope Valley in Derbyshire, UK, with subsidiary businesses located in Germany and the USA. Products are exported to over 100 countries worldwide through a network of experienced distributors.

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