



Ireland-based service provider leverages Xterity Cloud to drive competitive advantage, reduce customer OPEX and augment its services portfolio

The Customer

ICE Cube is a Galway-based technology business with a rich 40-year heritage providing I.T. infrastructure, support and software solutions to a number of niche market segments in the UK and Ireland. A market leader, ICE Cube is responsible for designing and developing the leading industry software package CU247, which is used in Credit Unions all over the island of Ireland today. The company also works in the mart, market and quarry industries. Following four highly successful decades of growth and development, ICE Cube merged in late 2014 with the young and dynamic TecSupport. Today, ICE Cube's 55 exceptional staff members provide both hardware and software solutions in a tailored and dedicated fashion to all its customers. The company offers 24-hour support to all its customers as well as ongoing consultancy, maintenance and training.

The Business Challenge

To bolster its position as a market leader in serving credit unions throughout Ireland, in 2012 ICE Cube management began to research the benefits of leveraging the cloud for its customers. These benefits, contextualized in terms of cost savings, compliance, security and scalability included:

- No large upfront costs, just Pay-As-You-Go (CAPEX vs. OPEX)
- No need for customers to update servers resulting in substantial savings every 3–5 years
- Significantly reduced electricity bills
- Access to the credit union industry's leading enterprise management application—ICE CU247
- Financial services-industry levels of redundancy and disaster recovery

To bolster its position as market leader in serving credit unions throughout Ireland, in 2012 ICE Cube management began to research the benefits of leveraging cloud for their customers.

“One of the critical business issues we were looking to solve was to provide a solution where we could move customers from our legacy platform to a modern product offering tailored to the needs of credit unions,” explained William Johnstone, Head of Professional Services, ICE Cube. “Additionally, we wanted to open up new channels and services to our member credit unions without having to first invest and absorb the cost of hardware investment and 24/7 management and support. A key driver behind offering the upgrade was ensuring continued compliance in an ever regulated industry.”

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An additional driver, cited Johnstone, was the efficiencies ICE Cube had realized in migrating some of its own servers to the cloud.

“Those efficiencies were significant and we wanted to provide some of those same benefits for our customers, regardless of size or volume of business,” said Johnstone.

According to Johnstone, the criteria a prospective vendor had to satisfy was driven as much by technical considerations as it was by proximity and, given the financial nature of its business, how secure its cloud solution could be made.

“Security and compliance was a massive part of the selection process because our customers are individuals (and institutions) working in the financial services industry. To support these needs we have a complex application configuration set up that we prefer our internal infrastructure team manage themselves, rather than handing them off to a third party,” said Johnstone. “We also needed to work with a business which, preferably, was located in the local jurisdiction. This satisfies not only the rules governing data storage in the EU (European Union), but also ensures availability should we ever have need to access it quickly.”

What is ILCU.net?

ILCU.net is the brand name for a secure all-island computer network to which all credit unions can be connected. ILCU.net is the first step towards providing future products and services to your members at a reasonable cost. It is the core component of the Credit Union ICT Strategy. Its main purpose is to provide a delivery mechanism for ILCUbis—the credit union business intelligence service and future products and services. Its benefits include:

- **A Credit Union Network for Credit Unions.** ILCU.net is wholly owned by credit unions.
- **Managed for Credit Union people by Credit Union people.** The ICT Office ensures members are getting the best service available and will assist with queries.
- **High End Security.** Top-of-the-range security protection for all credit unions regardless of their size.
- **Fast Network Speed.** Credit unions can connect to ILCU.net through a large range of access methods. In the majority of cases this allows the credit union the luxury of choosing the connection speed that suits them.
- **Internet Protection.** ILCU.net offers members top of the range protection against Internet based threats in accordance with best business practices by providing anti virus protection and limiting access to inappropriate websites.
- **Reduced Connectivity Cost.** Most credit unions with sub offices see a reduction in cost for connectivity between offices by using ILCU.net, and current expenses for other network services and firewalls may be eliminated.
- **Secure Remote Access.** Upon request and subject to member credit policies and procedures, credit unions may have the facility access systems while they are on the road, through a secure remote access solution.

Source: The Irish League of Credit Unions

Crucially, the chosen vendor would also have to be able to seamlessly link onto ILCU.net, the brand name for a secure computer network, owned and managed by the Irish League of Credit Unions to which all credit unions throughout the isle can be connected (see sidebar). This linkage was essential, explained Johnstone, so ICE Cube could both provide support and guarantee service.

“ILCU.net is a military grade, secure private network for credit unions and we have to be able to serve our products and services over that network,” said Johnstone.

After an exhausting year-long search for a vendor who could satisfy each of these criteria, ICE Cube chose the only company capable of being able to check off every box associated with its technical, proximal and overall business requirements: Xterity.

Solution

Ultimately, an ability to provide connectivity to POP/Circuits connecting to the private and secure MPLS network (e.g. ILCU.net) served as the tipping point for ICE Cube to partner with Xterity.

“To configure ICE Cube so the two networks could talk to one another took a great deal of technical configuration,” explained Johnstone. “In addition, Xterity was able to propagate a standards-based solution that enabled us to build out productive, responsive environments, and send them on to customers that may have been particularly price sensitive.”

Aside from the more technical considerations required to be put into place to make all of this work seamlessly, ICE Cube also spent a great deal of time in educating customers about the cloud and why it was being offered to them as a service in the first place.

“While the cloud wasn’t necessarily a novel construct here in Ireland, it was new to credit unions. In fact, we were the first supplier to offer a full scale cloud enterprise system, within our space, in Ireland,” said Johnstone. “As business to business customers became increasingly comfortable with cloud, we were able to position ICE Cube as the ‘affordable IT Solution for your Credit Union.’”

As cleverly articulated by ICE Cube on its website: The easiest way to understand the cloud is to think of it as a utility, like electricity. When you plug a device into a wall socket, electricity flows.

ICE Cloud works on the same principle. Through an Internet connection (the equivalent of an electrical socket), ICE Cube’s customers can access their credit union’s system anytime, anywhere, from any device (complete access flexibility). The potential benefits of this approach are enormous;

- Reduced hardware investment
- Eased compliance workload for credit unions, with ICE Cube responsible for satisfying most requirements
- Instant access to software upgrades
- Business continuity and disaster recovery—data is stored off-site and backed up by ICE Cloud
- Flexibility to accommodate growth
- Improved physical and data security

According to Johnstone, what also set apart Xterity from other vendors was its technical know-how and the way company approached the business relationship.

“We have peace-of-mind knowing we have backup for technical support. We can predict, in real-time, the cost for our end users on a month to month basis and we have rapid access to Xterity’s sales, field, technical and marketing teams to achieve positive outcomes for our customers. In those ways and

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others ICE Cube and Xterity have more of a partnership than a vendor-client relationship,” explained Johnstone.

He added, “Three years running, and as the Xterity product offering has evolved and matured it’s kept pace with our needs and I expect it’s fully in line to support our product, services and business needs over the long-term.”

Value Realized, a Look Forward

As cloud in general and ICE Cube’s Cloud services in particular became more accepted among more and more businesses in a myriad of industries, measuring its impact on their own bottom line is not lost on Johnstone and his executive team.

“In the beginning, prospective credit unions by and large were unaware of the cloud and all of the possibilities it offered to them,” explained Johnstone. “However, as more of our constituents became accustomed and even expected it, our ability to offer a cloud solution rapidly became a check box for them.”

That shift in mindset in delivering purpose-built cloud solutions also has implications for ICE Cube’s bottom line. “Being in a position to offer our customers the ICE Cloud solution has allowed us to maintain and build our recurring revenue streams.”

As for how this partnership between Xterity and ICE Cube will evolve in the coming years, Johnstone sees parallels between their twinned professional trajectory and the payoffs to customers enabled by it.

“When we made the decision to roll out a cloud solution initially we felt our application was architected in a way that a smooth transition to the cloud could happen. The last thing we wanted was to have to rebuild a tried and tested architecture and support multiple code. Working closely with Xterity we found a solution that was minimally disruptive to our current model but provoked massive disruption in the industry.” said Johnstone.

He added, “For our next generation cloud offering, I envision even closer collaboration with the technical people at ICE Cube and Xterity so we can built the best, most cost-efficient and technically astute cloud service for customers.”

In sum and revisiting the partnership nature of this relationship, Johnstone is quick to suggest the outcomes made possible by Xterity have broad implications for ICE Cube’s own customer base.

“Where I see this going, ultimately, is to get to a clean, multi-tenant environment and I firmly believe that in collaboration with our internal technical resources, Xterity can augment with additional expertise to get us there in the most cost effective and efficient manner possible. I also see an opportunity to offer a set of refined services across the board to all our customers, for example, to include virtual desktop and remote management offerings and more. That’s where I’d like to see the partnership go, in service to our customers, which, of course, is why we’re in business in the first place,” concluded Johnstone.

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About Xterity

Xterity was founded with the vision of bringing carrier-grade reliability and availability to the cloud. The Xterity infrastructure has been designed using the same philosophy that drives the rest of our business: combine best-in-class technologies with people who are highly motivated and dedicated to providing superior customer service.

High-availability is provided at both the virtualisation layer and hardware layer (using Egenera PAN Manager software) with physical hosts protected by Egenera PAN Manager’s N+1 DR capabilities.

Xterity delivers a set of cloud services that exceed the expectations of the most demanding customer at a price that is affordable by all. Today, organisations in finance, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, government and other business sectors rely on Xterity to support their computing needs. Contact us today to learn more.

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