



Techgate plc

BACKGROUND

Formed in 2001, Techgate plc has established itself as a leading provider of flexible, high availability, IT managed services with an established background in business continuity. Its client base is wide and varied, spanning small to medium sized organisations, as well as large enterprises. With its wholly owned, highly resilient network infrastructure, along with its UK based data centres, Techgate is able to offer an end-to-end service that is seamless and above all, trusted. Indeed, security of data has always been a byword for the organisation's strategy and market differentiation.

Having certified to BS 25999, the British Standard for Business Continuity Management in 2012, the logical next step was to certify against ISO 27001, the International Standard for Information Security Management and it duly achieved this goal in the summer of 2013. This case study focuses on some of the key aspects of the journey to certification and the benefits that Techgate has derived.



ISO 27001 BUSINESS DRIVERS

With a close knit workforce and high staff retention, Techgate has always prided itself on having a security aware culture surrounding strong working practices, albeit without some formalisation in certain areas. The decision to seek certification to ISO 27001 was primarily client and commercially led. The Company was finding an increasing number of tenders stipulating ISO 27001 and Techgate's Leadership Team had identified certification as being a significant market differentiator.

Graham Green, Operations Director at Techgate, who also oversaw the ISO 27001 implementation, believed that the organisation was at an optimum stage in terms of its size and growth to introduce more formalisation into its Information Security Management System (ISMS). He adds "We had increasingly been attracting the interests of enterprise-size clients and considered that ISO 27001 certification was the most effective way of demonstrating the Company's commitment to information security and the protection of customer data."

■ KEY STAGES INVOLVED IN CERTIFICATION

Having already achieved BS 25999 certification, Techgate had a number of the management system building blocks in place. Therefore, the main initial focus of ISO 27001 activity was on conducting a compliant risk assessment which would help in prioritising the security controls to be improved and implemented.

Scope

For Techgate, there was little internal debate on the scope of certification. As Graham explains “Certifying the whole organisation was the only sensible option, given the need for a consistent approach and the need to maximise the perceived value with clients. In addition, a whole organisation scope negated the need to create internal service level agreements.”

Business Impact Analysis and Risk Assessment

Graham Green found the risk assessment stage of the project to be enormously beneficial and valuable in providing the foundation and direction for risk remediation activities. Utilising the expertise of URM and its risk assessment tool Abriska, Techgate was able to quickly and easily generate the necessary ISO 27001 compliant information to start the implementation process e.g. Statement of Applicability, Risk Assessment, Asset Register. This helped free up the Leadership Team to focus on deciding collectively how to treat the different identified risks in an appropriate and sensible manner.

Prior to ISO 27001, there had only been a limited awareness and exposure to how risks were addressed in other parts of the business e.g. Technical, Commercial etc. The ‘communal’ risk management decision making by the Leadership Team proved particularly valuable when having to make ‘wider implication’ decisions regarding business risks that affected more than one functional area. The whole process helped move Techgate from an intuitive risk management approach to a more formalised and structured one. This is now embraced throughout the organisation.

Later ISO 27001 Lifecycle Stages

As the ISO 27001 project moved from the ‘Plan’ into the ‘Do-Check-Act’ phases, Techgate took greater ownership for the implementation of different security controls and the measures to reduce associated risks e.g. developing and enhancing policy and procedural documentation. At this stage, URM played a useful role in guiding Techgate to extend its existing Business Continuity Management System (BCMS) to include the new information security requirements. Graham adds “Great care was taken to ensure the management system was appropriate to our business i.e. consolidating incident and corrective action identification and tracking, audit activities and risk treatment into a single log and not producing documentation for documentation’s sake. URM was also invaluable as a sounding board for policy and process review, maintaining timely progress, and for helping drive internal awareness and understanding.”

■ KEY SUCCESS CRITERIA

Senior Management Commitment and Involvement

Techgate’s Leadership Team has been actively involved in all stages of ISO 27001 implementation, from the initial risk assessment to the ongoing maintenance and development of the ISMS. This was conducted predominantly through the Team’s existing monthly meetings, thereby ensuring that the system became part of ‘business as usual’ rather than an expensive add-on.



Graham Green, Operations Director



Project Champion

Having a project champion in the form of Graham Green was essential to maintaining the focus and momentum of the project. The fact that the project champion was a member of the Leadership Team was an added benefit and ensured the project was given the focus and necessary management and business commitment required.

External Assistance

Graham believes that Techgate benefited from having external support for the implementation from URM, as their accumulated experience of working with a range of other organisations ensured that an appropriate system was developed and that several costly mistakes were avoided. "Without URM, we would have struggled in our interpretation of the Standard and we would have almost certainly ended in a different place. URM's consultants were able to demystify what was perceived as a complex set of requirements and controls within ISO 27001 and helped steer Techgate in implementing a pragmatic and appropriate ISMS."

Maximising Use of Technology

Throughout the implementation of different controls, Techgate has utilised electronic solutions to the maximum e.g. the use of automated logs and Web portals for change control and incident reporting. This reduces the opportunity for information to go missing as there are no paper copies to get lost, ensures that everything is stored in one place but is freely available to all to use as required and, along with workflow, makes sure that information is routed to the correct place in a timely manner. With change logs and help desk facilities now all available through a Web portal and in line with the continuous improvement model, Graham Green is looking to introduce further automation to the remaining paper-based processes.

Value of Awareness Training

Staff awareness training was invaluable in two respects. Initially, awareness training focused on communicating to all employees the message of why Techgate was seeking certification and what the role of each individual was in the process. Later the training was focused on ensuring all staff were aware of information security related policies and procedures, along with their individual responsibilities. Graham comments "It was important to stress to all staff that information security follows a continuous improvement process and that any controls being formalised or implemented would go through a review process to ensure that they do not hinder the business, but provide appropriate and adequate protection."

During the project kick off, Techgate was able to use awareness training to promote the benefits of ISO 27001 certification and address any staff concerns or issues. The decision to seek certification was greatly welcomed by sales personnel who had experience of missing out on contracts through not being registered. However, the benefits of certification were not so immediately obvious to members of the technical team who, initially, were less supportive, especially when asked to develop procedural documentation. Over time though, technical staff began to appreciate the positive aspects of the system, such as having greater visibility of technical system events, detecting trends and quantifying time spent dealing with technical changes due to potential vulnerabilities.

Awareness training has been greatly assisted by the introduction of A5 sized ISMS and BCMS manuals which provide concise and accessible summaries of key policies and processes. In addition, these manuals can be used as powerful sales tools as they do not contain any sensitive information and can be handed out to potential customers.

■ BENEFITS DERIVED

Internal Operational Benefits

Graham Green believes the security aware culture at Techgate has been enhanced by implementing ISO 27001 “As it has provided more structure, as well as enhancing and reinforcing working practices. Whilst the Technical Team was initially wary of introducing greater documentation and formalisation into working practices, there has been an acknowledgement of the value gained from introducing change and incident logs. The Technical Team is now able to operate against structure and standards and has become more proactive and efficient as a result.”

Incident reporting is a good example of where improvements have been identified. An improved structure has been created through use of a portal where all incidents can be reported. The enhancements have led to an increase in incidents being reported, which in turn has given the Leadership Team greater visibility of what is actually going on in the organisation. There is now a central view of potential vulnerabilities or threats that represent risks to Techgate.

The introduction of visitor passes and lanyards has improved physical security within the Company. At its Head Office in the Docklands, Techgate’s offices are split by a communal building lift and visitor passes have served to make the identification of visitors a lot easier.

Another internal improvement has been seen in the joiners and leavers process which has become more formalised, with greater accountability being introduced around the timing of different actions e.g. when leavers’ system access needs to be removed.

External Sales Benefits

ISO 27001 certification has undoubtedly added to the status of Techgate and helped it to be viewed as a mature and serious player in the market, particularly by enterprise clients.

Graham adds “There is high awareness of ISO 27001 amongst customers and stakeholders who appreciate the commitment and overhead involved in achieving and maintaining certification and the need for a high degree of ISMS maturity.” He also believes that with its higher profile, there is more cachet attached to ISO 27001 certification than with other standards. “Data security is seen as having so many different components and holding an ISO 27001 certificate has been beneficial to Techgate’s Sales Team in converting prospective clients, as well as completing tenders. The Standard also introduces a different perspective when dealing with suppliers and potential suppliers. Given the global background of many of our suppliers, Techgate is often not in a position to mandate ISO 27001 certification on them, however it has proved highly useful as a platform for discussing common security issues.”



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