WM Promus helps university boost efficiency and security

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

When WM Promus was engaged to help the University of Sussex achieve its Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation, it designed a phased migration away from end of life CentOS Linux servers to Red Hat Enterprise Linux. After running a pilot and teaching the university DevOps practices, it also helped engineers adopt automation with Red Hat Ansible Automation Platform. The university now has a secure, robust environment and is eliminating manual processes, leaving staff more skilled, productive, and satisfied.

Industry

IT services and consulting

Headquarters

London, UK

Size

30 employees

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General Manager, WM Promus

Software and services

Red Hat® Enterprise Linux®

Red Hat Ansible® Automation Platform

Partner resources

Red Hat Solution Provider Program

Benefits

- Improved security and compliance
- Increased engineer productivity with automation
- Embedded DevOps best practices

Red Hat Innovators in the Open

About Red Hat Innovators in the Open

Innovation is the core of open source. Red Hat customers use open source technologies to change not only their own organizations, but also entire industries and markets. Red Hat Innovators in the Open proudly showcases how our customers use enterprise open source solutions to solve their toughest business challenges. Want to share your story? Learn more.

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Delivering innovative technologies to help customers boost productivity and efficiency

WM Promus has been delivering IT services and solutions to customers for more than 15 years. This leading software services and consultancy firm helps businesses find the right solutions to address their challenges and succeed in the future.

The company has a dedicated team of experts driving digital transformations that deliver great results. In 2023, it joined the Red Hat Solution Provider Program. The company collaborates with Red Hat to deliver enterprise-wide, scalable solutions with Red Hat Enterprise Linux, a flexible, stable operating system to support hybrid cloud innovation and Red Hat Ansible Automation Platform, an enterprise framework for building and operating IT automation from hybrid cloud to the edge.

Investing in Red Hat to improve security and simplify infrastructure management

The University of Sussex had a large number of servers running CentOS, mostly version 7, which in June 2024 was coming to its end of life. The engineering team spent a lot of time patching systems, which was inefficient and unsatisfying. Like all universities, it was under pressure to get more return on investment, so it needed a more cost-effective approach that freed up skilled workers for higher value tasks.

Aware that running end of life software would also leave the university highly exposed to security risks, it began discussions with WM Promus in August 2023 looking for a way to mitigate the risks and achieve its Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation, as required by the government.

The university had limited in-house resources, so finding a partner with the right skills to guide the transformation was vital. Red Hat accredited partner, WM Promus, recommended Red Hat Enterprise Linux – an enterprise Linux operating system that provides a secure and stable foundation for hybrid environments – as the closest like-for-like operating system to CentOS Linux knowing that its advanced security capabilities and built-in management and analytics features would give the university a more robust foundation for the future.

"The university needed to find a new operating system quickly. Having production apps running on unsupported software is risky, and the university's engineers were too busy running the complex hybrid environment to take the lead with the migration," said Eileen O'Mahony, General Manager, WM Promus.

When WM Promus assessed the university's environment, the team also recommended Ansible Automation Platform – which enables infrastructure-as-a-code – to streamline the migration and automate the business-as-usual tasks that were taking up so much of the university's time.

Leading a phased migration and training the university's team to be more self-sufficient

WM Promus led a phased migration over 65 days. During the discovery phase, the team carried out a health check of the university's estate, resolved any issues that would slow the migration, and identified key stakeholders involved in the project. In addition, WM Promus worked alongside the university to identify redundant servers, leading to the retirement of more than 100 disused servers. The team prioritized migrating mission critical or student-facing applications and servers first.

The company then ran a pilot to migrate 5 servers for the university, and used lessons learned during this phase to speed up the rest of the pipeline.

"Moving from CentOS Linux to Red Hat Enterprise Linux made the transition easy for users. It's built on the same code, so it looks familiar and apps that run on CentOS run well on Red Hat Enterprise Linux," said O'Mahony. "It's the best long-term option for production use, and because it's fully supported and reliable, it reduces total cost of ownership compared with staying on a free solution."

The migration jump-started the university's DevOps adoption and helped to embed best practices. In parallel to phase one, WM Promus undertook a health check of the configuration management processes and tools. The team ran workshops with the university's engineers around version control and automation to teach them new skills and increase buy-in.

"It was vital to have clear communication and collaboration with the university to make the engineers' experience seamless and enjoyable," said O'Mahony. "We left them with the skills they need to optimize the university's estate to support its future needs, and their enthusiasm will keep the momentum going throughout the project."

Red Hat Ansible Automation Platform was implemented to simplify the migration and daily tasks such as patch management, user access, and installing software agents. WM Promus co-coded playbooks alongside the university's internal engineers, who embedded best practice and learned how to create their own playbooks.

"Ansible Automation Platform means the university won't lose time on building, configuring, testing, maintaining, and decommissioning environments manually. Its engineers can code once and run playbooks, which is more efficient and eliminates manual errors," said O'Mahony. "That leaves in-house engineers more time to focus on higher value tasks."

Improving efficiency, quality, and security at the university with a standard and reliable platform

Improved security and compliance

By migrating from CentOS Linux to Red Hat Enterprise Linux – a fully supported platform – the University of Sussex reduced the risks of a cyber attack impacting its mission critical servers.

"The university has a massive IT estate. Moving to Red Hat Enterprise Linux minimized disruption and meant the team could mitigate risks quickly," said O'Mahony. Red Hat Enterprise Linux also offers consistent control across the large, hybrid cloud environment and has built-in tools to simplify compliance and audits.

Following the successful engagement, the university can prevent security breaches and work towards its Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation.

"Thanks to WM Promus, we have migrated from CentOS to a supported operating system that best suits our needs, Red Hat Enterprise Linux," said Neil Atherley, Head of Networks and Infrastructure, IT Services, University of Sussex.

Increased engineer productivity with automation

Engineers use Ansible Automation Platform to automate repetitive, manual processes. This reduced pressure on the team and increased their capacity for more satisfying work. "Within a month we were able to demonstrate that automation would enable the university's IT team to do more with less effort," said O'Mahony.

About WM Promus

London-based software services provider, WM Promus, delivers digital transformation through DevOps and automation. It helps businesses to modernize their environments and improve productivity and efficiency.

Automation also eliminates the risks of human error when developing and testing new releases and ensures best practices are followed consistently.

"Through automation, using Red Hat Ansible, [WM Promus] have streamlined our processes, introducing consistency and best practice, saving us both time and resources," said Atherley.

Embedded DevOps best practices

Adopting DevOps best practices has improved collaboration, version control, and code-change tracking. "Our job is to advise and guide. We left the university with the tools and methodology to succeed in the future," said O'Mahony.

The new approach enables the university to innovate faster and keep apps and systems highly available for staff and students.

"Not only did [WM Promus's] collaborative approach and clear communication ensure the entire experience was seamless and enjoyable, but we also gained valuable insights that will continue to drive our success in the future," said Atherly.

Putting the foundations in place for a long-term partnership

With Red Hat technology and support from WM Promus, the university mitigated the risks of running EOL software on its servers and established a more robust, secure foundation. When it achieves its Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation, WM Promus plans to help the university adopt the system management software, Red Hat Satellite, which will make it easier to deploy, scale, and manage its Red Hat infrastructure.

"Implementing Red Hat Satellite will provide even greater value for money, but it's important to get your environment in order first," said O'Mahony. "We've given the university a good foundation to work from, and when the team is ready to move on to the next stage, we can help them automate more tasks and monitor their environment with native Red Hat features."

About The University of Sussex

The University of Sussex is a leading higher education and research institution near Brighton, in the south of England. For over 60 years, the aim of university's courses, research, culture, and campus has been to stimulate, excite, and challenge. From scientific discovery to global policy, from student welfare to career development, Sussex innovates and takes a lead. Today, in every part of society and across the world, individuals from Sussex are making original and valuable contributions.

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