

FROM OUTDATED TO FULL-SPEED AHEAD: CARMICHAEL CONSULTING HELPS APPEN MEDIA GROUP WRITE A NEW CHAPTER

For news and information publishing company Appen Media Group, having access to functional, affordable technology is mission critical. The 26-employee enterprise doesn't have the IT budget of a large corporation, yet it relies on high-end IT solutions to create, format and disseminate the news. When Appen Media Group Owner Christina Appen's frustration with her previous IT provider reached the boiling point, she turned to Carmichael Consulting for assistance.

Carmichael planned and implemented a complete overhaul of her IT solutions, empowering her workers with the tools they need to be productive. "Now, our team has more time for creative work, because they are not working on technology problems," says Appen. "Our customers are getting better quality work and products from us."

A BLENDED ENVIRONMENT FINDS A PARTNER

As is the case with so many firms, Appen Media Group's dissatisfaction with its former IT provider increased gradually. "We were not getting a streamlined picture of our IT, and we were all over the board in using our resources," says Appen. "My budget was not being managed."

Around that time, Appen was introduced to Carmichael Consulting at a networking event, and she decided to give them the opportunity to bid on the job. With a blended Mac and PC environment, Appen Media Group was a perfect match for Carmichael, which specializes in Mac and PC systems and environments for both. Half of Appen's 26 users work remotely, and Carmichael also had significant expertise in mobility, as well.

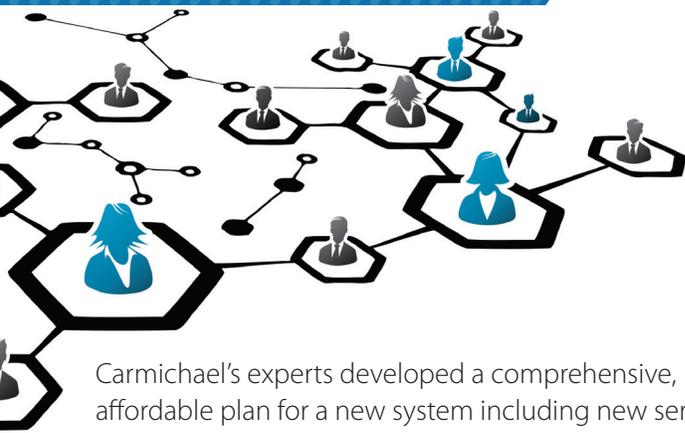
"Over the years, we had put in a hodgepodge of systems that were not working together to make us efficient," says Christina Appen, Publisher. "We had a few different servers, and we were not getting data backups in a timely way."



THE MAKEOVER BEGINS

Carmichael began the project with a complete IT assessment focused not only on mapping the systems but also on prioritizing the most pressing issues. The report results were clear: Appen Media Group's backup solution—an external hard drive that Appen took home every night—was putting the company and its intellectual assets at risk. Upgrading aging, overloaded servers running 32-bit Windows 2003 Small Business Server was priority number two.

case study



Carmichael's experts developed a comprehensive, affordable plan for a new system including new servers, a network-attached storage device (NAS) for local backup, and automated cloud backup service CrashPlan PROe for redundant offsite backup. For the deployment, Carmichael worked evenings and weekends to ensure zero client downtime, installing all systems and migrating more than three TB of data to servers running 64-bit Windows 2011 Small Business Server.

FROM BARE METAL TO BETTER THAN EVER

For the next phase, Carmichael developed a user-level upgrade plan, including forsaking out-of-support Windows XP and moving highly mobile staff to laptops. Over an 18-month period, Carmichael migrated Appen Media Group's desktops to either Windows 7 or iMac computers. It also equipped the sales team with new laptops connected to company servers via a virtual private network (VPN).

In the process, Carmichael standardized Appen Media Group's Windows hardware on an all-Dell framework. The switch simplifies warranty management and enabled Carmichael to extend the company a further discount through its membership in the Dell Consultants Network.

Final improvements included a new 10Mbit Metro E Wi-Fi network and a 1000Mbit wired network for added throughput and connectivity. Carmichael also upgraded Appen Media Group to hosted Microsoft Exchange and helped them evaluate and deploy Account Scout, a billing, accounting and ad placement platform.

A BRIGHT HORIZON

Most recently, Appen says, Carmichael helped them research a new VoIP platform and more software upgrades.

They are also meeting and performing evaluations regularly to ensure Appen Media Group never falls behind the IT curve, again.

"Our previous providers were doing an annual review, but we weren't looking at technology often enough. Our industry—especially desktop production software—evolves rapidly," says Appen. "With Carmichael, we meet monthly to discuss our ongoing IT progress and discuss what we might need to address next."

Carmichael also provides all of Appen Media Group's IT support, which, along with the upgrades, has made a significant difference for the company and its workers.

"We're able to respond faster to customers and have more time for creative work in the production department. We're not wasting time and money on IT," says Appen. "We also have a more professional system for planning, meeting and getting problems solved."

Appen is so pleased with the results that when her CPA began experiencing IT problems, she referred Carmichael to him—on three separate occasions. "Carmichael brings corporate thinking to a small business. Their expertise is affordable, and they are responsive to our needs, despite our size," Appen concludes. "They also have integrity. They always tell me, 'We'll find a solution that you can afford. It may take a while, but we'll make it affordable, over time.'"

ABOUT APPEN MEDIA GROUP

Appen Media Group is a local media company based in Alpharetta, GA. Founded in 1990, Appen Media Group publishes a number of local newspapers and magazines as well as digital news and other local products. For more information, contact Appen Media Group Publisher Ray Appen at **770-442-3278 ext. 101**, or visit **www.northfulton.com**.