

# Case Study



## Quote

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Paul Collins  
Head of Cloud & Infrastructure Services

## IT provider helps SMBs avoid business interruption with cloud-based disaster recovery by Microsoft

Until recently, many small and midsize businesses (SMBs) could not afford disaster recovery (DR) solutions that would keep their businesses running if a disaster shut down their office. Sol-Tec, an IT provider in the UK, uses Microsoft Azure Site Recovery to offer SMBs big-company disaster protection at small-company prices. The new solution meets a significant need for customers and gives Sol-Tec a way to increase revenues and make better use of staff.

### Background

With businesses so dependent on technology—and with technology so often affected by weather, electrical irregularities, and other unexpected obstacles—organizations of all sizes want a technology backup plan, and a backup for the backup.

“For a small business, even an air-conditioner failure in the server room represents a show-stopping disaster,” says Paul Collins, Head of Cloud & Infrastructure Services at Sol-Tec Limited.

Sol-Tec is a leading IT services provider in the United Kingdom that for more than 20 years has offered consulting, cloud services solution design, systems maintenance, technical support, and asset management services for small and midsize businesses (SMBs). The Reading, Berkshire-based company has 55 employees and hundreds of customers.

Sol-Tec started selling backup solutions 22 years ago and has since evolved along with technological advancements and customer needs. In 2005, the company became a member of the Microsoft Partner Network and, more recently, earned a Microsoft Cloud Platform competency.

When Microsoft began rolling out cloud services, such as Microsoft Office 365 and Microsoft Azure, Sol-Tec embraced the cloud in a big way. “We saw that the cloud was the future and that our path to growth was to bundle our services with Microsoft cloud offerings,” Collins says. Today, Sol-Tec sells Office 365 for productivity solutions, Microsoft Intune device management services, and Azure-based backup, infrastructure services, hybrid storage, and more, all with local setup and support.

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## Cost-effective, comprehensive DR

One business area that was crying out for cloud support: disaster protection. While Sol-Tec had been providing off-site business continuity solutions for a decade, those solutions involved setting up duplicate infrastructures at multiple hosting provider locations and were far too expensive for most SMBs.

In 2014, Microsoft announced Microsoft Azure Site Recovery (ASR), a cloud-based disaster recovery (DR) orchestration service that coordinates the replication and recovery of virtual machines across sites. “We evaluated ASR against other, more traditional off-site DR solutions that performed server replication,” Collins says. “After comparing costs, functionality, and simplicity, choosing ASR as the foundation for a DR service was a no-brainer. It was also a good fit alongside the other products and services that we work with daily, so our support teams didn’t have to learn new technologies.”

Sol-Tec offers a fully managed DR service based on ASR that customers can buy on a per-server, per-month basis. The company creates a DR infrastructure for a customer in Azure, monitors the customer’s production workloads (running at the customer site or a hosting services provider) around the clock, and switches the workloads to Azure if there’s a problem at the primary facility—all from the Sol-Tec office. The customer can run key applications from Azure for any period of time. Then, when the primary site is ready to take over again, Sol-Tec moves the production workloads back.

“Azure Site Recovery has revolutionized our disaster recovery offerings in the SMB market,” Collins says. “Simply put, we can provide centrally managed DR capability to our SMB customers for 44 percent lower costs than renting space at third-party hosting providers.”

Plus, ASR provides a central console where partners like Sol-Tec can manage all their customers’ DR infrastructures. “The availability of a cloud-based centralized console allows us to manage customer backups/DR regardless of our location, and we no longer have to install and configure management consoles on separate customer locations,” Collins says..

## Ease of use means staff freed up for other tasks

Sol-Tec engineers found ASR simple to set up and configure, and they have reduced the time spent monitoring off-site

off-site replication status and resolving stalled or failed workload replications. But the company realized the most improved efficiency in testing DR plans, which even small businesses are often required by customers or regulatory agencies to run routinely to demonstrate disaster preparedness.

“Using ASR, we have been able to perform no-impact, orchestrated test failovers without leaving our desks,” Collins says. “This has created new opportunities for us in terms of freeing up operations staff to focus elsewhere and in enhancing our DR service.”

Previously, Sol-Tec would expend significant engineering effort to ensure that a customer’s DR environment was ready for activation and had enough capacity to take over production workloads. During the 2012 Summer Games in London, many customers wanted Sol-Tec to test their failover plans in case of any unforeseen events. Performing these tests cost Sol-Tec an engineer from its service desk for three to four weeks.

With ASR, Sol-Tec performs a failover test in about an hour. That time savings multiplied by a dozen customers with DR plans is significant. “We’ve been able to refocus our staff on support, which helps us win new business,” Collins says. “We won’t have to hire another engineer to handle our anticipated 30 percent growth over the next six months.”

## Opportunities for growth

Sol-Tec expects to expand its DR business by 50 percent, basically selling ASR to all customers who wanted a DR solution but couldn’t afford one. “Each time we present one Microsoft cloud service to customers, it opens doors to sell others,” Collins says. “Plus, with cloud solutions, we’re better able to elevate the sales discussion to business problems rather than servers, cables, and network speeds, which make our customers’ eyes glaze over.”

While many SMBs embrace the cloud, few are ready to move everything there—and Microsoft solutions give Sol-Tec an advantage in that respect, too. The company can build a complete offering that includes an on-premises line-of-business application with cloud-based backup, disaster recovery, and device management.

“Microsoft is one of the only vendors that provides end-to-end solutions from the datacenter to the cloud. That hybrid breadth is a benefit to our customers. They are quite confident knowing that their applications are running and well protected in Microsoft datacenters,” says Collins.

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