

ALEX RABBETTS, MIGRATION SOLUTIONS



INNOVATORS

DATA PROTECTION

WHY MODERN LIFE RELIES SO HEAVILY ON THE STRENGTH OF DATA CENTRES SUCH AS THE ONES RUN BY MIGSOLV

Think your life is unaffected by data centres? Think again. Alex Rabbetts rattles through the reasons we should be thankful for them.

“Without data centres, our world would pretty much grind to a halt in a very short time,” he says dramatically. “No banks, no traffic lights, no shipping, no petrol stations, no food in a very short while. We’re all dependent on them in some way, yet most of us have never seen one and probably don’t even know of their existence.”

Alex runs the UK’s only consultancy dedicated to advising companies how to operate effective computer systems and is proud to celebrate its 15th anniversary with a new name and a new identity.

He formed Migration Solutions in 2001 because he saw a gap in the market. He was working for a Dutch-American company which offered what were then called “carrier hotels, or internet exchanges” and realised there was an opportunity to set up a

business offering protection for valuable computer data.

Alex rented a small office in Redhill, Surrey, and started to put the word out about what he could do to help businesses run systems more effectively. “This was a new world,” he recalls. “Data centres didn’t exist, the worldwide web was still in its relative infancy and companies were learning how to use it.”

Almost immediately, Alex hit lucky. A friend told him that Cable and Wireless had a client which could use his company’s services. He hesitates in his machine gun flow of speech to say: “I can’t tell you which company it was – there’s a huge atmosphere of secrecy in the world

› Alex Rabbetts – a pioneer in the data centre industry, celebrating 15 years of business

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I work in. Let's just say it was a very large retail business and it gave me a brilliant start."

Next client was "a major British-owned oil company", for which Alex designed a disaster recovery centre. It soon became apparent he could not cope alone with the work he was generating and he took on four staff to see through a specific project. Three of those staff are still with him.

The company, which has just condensed its original title to MIGSOLV to celebrate its anniversary, now employs 38, most at its Lingfield headquarters. All but about five of those have been with Alex for more than five years.

Why Lingfield? "We don't need to be in London. We rarely have clients visit us, we mostly have to go to them, to see what they need us to do. Our headquarters are handy for Gatwick, the M25 and other services."

With such an emphasis on security, Alex is rigid on employing fully security checked staff. Many of his clients are big names in business, as well as the government and the NHS. "We definitely punch above our weight," he says proudly.

"People call us in because they have a problem, but most don't want people to know that they have a problem. They expect us to protect their reputation."

Alex refers to data centres as "one of the world's best-kept secrets", but assures me they are "critical to everyday life".

"Without them, there's no doubt the world would quickly starve," he says dramatically.

One of the first questions Alex asks any new client is whether they have a disaster recovery plan for their computer data. "Some managers cheerfully tell me they back up their files every night and when I ask where they put the disk, they say 'oh, in my desk'. They don't realise how risky this is, if there's a fire, or some other disaster."

And it doesn't have to be a disaster of the company's making. Alex tells the story of a contractor in a northern city who burned through a cable, sending hundreds of companies' business off line. He says many lost all their data and points out that it is a known fact that a large percentage of businesses who go through such a traumatic incident will never recover.

So what's the next 15 years going to bring for Alex and his business? At 52, he has 30 years' experience under his belt, but he's good for a few more yet and fascinated by what's to come.

"The problem is, technology is moving so fast, it's difficult to predict," he says. "One thing is for certain, security of data will become even more important than it is already. I believe in the next



› A modern data centre

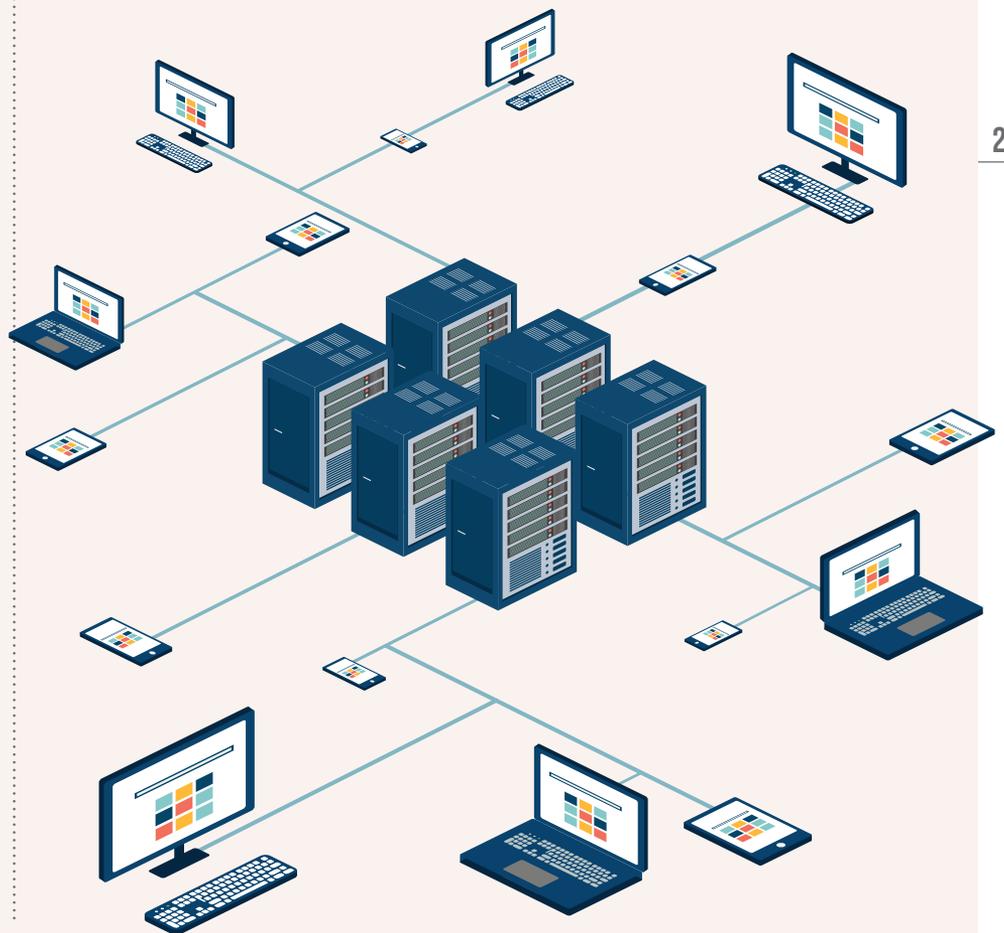
five to 10 years, it will be regarded as critical a part of the infrastructure as water, power and sewage.

And I believe MIGSOLV will be there in the forefront, helping companies preserve their most vital asset."

So what powers Alex when he's not busy in the

data centre world? His garden and kitchen.

"I love to grow things to eat – my garden contains no flowers," he says. "And when I harvest what I've grown, I love to cook. It's an amazing antidote to a high-pressure life."



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