

CASE STUDY

Less time behind a keyboard,
more time on the water

Office 365 and SharePoint bring collaboration and a single source of truth into an easy to use system, used across 25 locations.



Volunteer Marine Rescue Queensland (VMRAQ) provides volunteer marine search and rescue services to the boating public across 2,700km of Queensland coast, with 25 affiliated squadrons located throughout the State of Queensland.

Mayday, mayday

Keith Williams, General Manager of Marine Rescue Queensland says, "With only three and a half paid staff, two of whom are dedicated trainers, there are only one and a half people to manage an enterprise that consists of 25 locations, 50 vessels, 1460 volunteers, over 2500 rescues and more than 6000 rescue vessel operations a year. Add to that the burden of running a registered training organisation that is compliant to volunteers operating in a high risk environment and you can imagine that business processes, in particular the way they manage data, all have to be pretty spot on."

VMRAQ had many challenges – disparate systems across squadrons which meant collaboration was non-existent, different logon practices, users from remote areas with marginal internet access, no backup files and users all across Queensland who specialise in marine rescue vessel operations, not in technology.

These challenges resulted in each squadron having no idea what was going on in the field and it being near impossible to ensure everyone across each squadron had up to date training when an outdated database system managed their training records. Add to that the reality that several volunteers across the region were writing the same procedure and another volunteer was modifying technology from another organisation to use at VMRAQ - whilst drowning in other roles within the organisation - and this technology was still not coping with a major change in the training package, released by the Commonwealth Government.

They needed an intuitive, easy to use technology solution so their staff and volunteers could focus on what was important – keeping Queenslanders safe on the water.

Keith also wanted more for VMRAQ. He says, "I wanted statistics, I wanted data and I wanted business intelligence. I need this for funding applications and indeed I need this to justify our very existence. I needed a top-level integrated product with single sign on to access everything from email, to documents to training records and vessel activity."

Bailing out

Empired's Dave Paylor, who is an integral member of VMRAQ, proposed a solution to Keith when they finally met.

Managing documents across their disparate systems was the top priority for VMRAQ. The solution was to use a hub design, providing each squadron a new, simple portal that lets skippers share content. Built on SharePoint, running on Office 365, this lets VMRAQ share knowledge amongst squadrons. Along with other Empired employees, who donated work, Dave and Empired built an Azure based system for VMRAQ's email, website, administration records, training records and activity records so they are now fully integrated, with single sign-on.

Keith says, "We can see what other squadrons are doing and implement best practice procedures. This type of knowledge-sharing can literally save lives."

This system also displays incidents on maps and shows how much fuel squadrons have so they can always ensure they have the resources and safety measures in place to save lives. Squadron's headquarters have immediate access to information and visuals so

they can see what is happening in real-time, discuss it and provide input and feedback immediately. The learnings that come from these are then built into trainings to be learnt from around the region.

Data capture was next on the priority list for VMRAQ. Now, every time a rescue vessel is launched details are captured in the new portal including, how much fuel was used, how many people were assisted and how long the vessel was at sea. It also keeps track of all volunteers and their training records.

As most crew members are more interested in being out on the water than behind a keyboard, data capture was always a challenge. Too often organisations demand people to provide data, only for it to disappear into a black hole, never to be seen again. Now, every page in the new portal contains statistics from the database relevant to that page of information. If someone adds new information they can see the statistics change instantly, knowing they are making a difference.

Plain sailing

Keith says, "Acceptance has been universal. Users are loving the fact that they now only need to remember one username and password. Everything is in one place. Forms to enter data are simple, fast and intuitive. The rollover happened in mid-January 2018. In terms of providing technical support, the workload is now as low as it has ever been. Data is easy to enter, easy to access and in a word is a manager's dream".

"What Office 365 has given us is the ability to put everybody on the same page, for starters," Keith said. "But it also enables us to create group-based aliases, so I can just send an email to all volunteers in a region now, rather having to remember each individual person."

The new system is enabling volunteers to keep on top of the latest legislative changes from anywhere, at any time, on any device. Volunteers use their own devices and now can access all the same information. They are also able to collaborate from different locations like never before. This was proven when new legislation was released that VMRAQ now needs to maintain a risk register as well as having standard policies. They can't gather a thousand volunteers in one location to write and re-write these but they can now share and edit documents online easily with a single source of truth.

On the horizon

Keith says, "What will happen is that we'll end up with a system where people will be able to do completely self-based learning. They'll get the training material, they'll be able to sign in and perhaps have a co-ordinator sign off that they've done practical training skills in that area. Then they'll be able to do that exam in their own time at their own location, so SharePoint is bringing massive benefits to us."

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"It is an innovative way of getting a job done that we are compelled to do. What the community will see out of that is safer operations and better risk management. We need to know our volunteers are safe as well, so it's helping us meet that goal."

Keith Williams

General Manager,

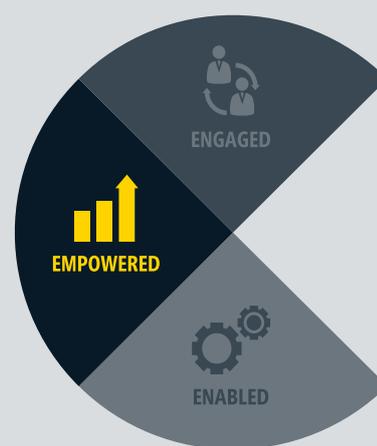
Volunteer Marine Rescue Queensland

SNAPSHOT

With disconnected systems over 25 locations VMRAQ required a system that would tie them all together and provide a single source of truth to every squadron. With up to date information and records available in seconds and collaboration channels open with the entire organisation they now have more time to save lives rather than drowning in administration.

ENGINE ROOM

Office 365, SharePoint Online, Power BI, Azure Active Directory, Azure SQL and Azure web apps.



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