

RedBit transforms technology to aid War Child Canada's humanitarian mission



REDBIT

On an important mission with outdated technology

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Finding a partner with a plan for the future

Recognizing the need for upgrades, War Child Canada joined with RedBit Development, who took immediate stock of their client's pain points.

Perfectly timed and expertly executed

In addition to technological upgrades, the enhanced security and data protection RedBit enacted meant an extra level of safety for the victims of conflict that War Child help.

Homes and businesses destroyed, crops eradicated. Schools requisitioned for use as makeshift army barracks and children recruited by warlords. Neighbourhoods torn apart by conflict face an uncertain future. How can they protect their children and heal their shattered communities? Into this darkness a dedicated group steps in with a plan to help, and the technology to bring it to fruition.

With boots on the ground in war zones throughout the world—Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan, to name a few, helping over 575,000 people—the staff of War Child Canada strives to heal the fissures caused by armed conflict. The nonprofit dedicates tireless resources to ensuring these innocent victims of war continue to get an education, have access to justice, and have a chance to build better futures for themselves.

"It could be a current conflict, it could be the situation following a conflict," says Dara McLeod, War Child Canada's Executive Director. "Our staff are on the frontlines delivering essential services to those communities."

For those workers and the staff at their home offices outside Toronto, prioritizing those services to victims of conflict came at the expense of settling for vastly outdated technology that made their jobs less efficient. With the realization that state-of-the-art tools could help them serve war-torn communities more effectively, War Child Canada looked for some help of their own.

"Nonprofits are absolutely the best at trying to find a way to make things work with whatever resources they can. (But War Child Canada's) technology infrastructure wasn't supporting them. It was not quite fallen apart but was in need of some TLC."

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Neglected technology

The work War Child Canada does, the scale of goodwill they contribute to the world stage, is all the more impressive when you get a glimpse behind the scenes at the technology they employed to make it work: By 2019, their “network” consisted of aged laptops running Windows XP, decentralized file-sharing conducted via email, a server that hadn’t been updated since 2007, and no formal IT department. Interoffice communication was becoming a logistical nightmare, with some of their 300 staff members across seven countries conducting business via text messages and others using WhatsApp or any number of other public platforms.

The inconvenience of outdated technology was one thing. But for an organization doing active work in war zones, helping displaced people who could still be in danger from dangerous factions, the lack of security for their data and documentation was unacceptable.

“Quite frankly, (our system) had just been so neglected for so many years and our only investment was trying to fix issues and just patch things up,” said Richard Corbridge, Chief Operating Officer of War Child Canada. “Our IT security just wasn't there.”

Recognizing the desperate need for upgrades across the board, War Child Canada put out feelers for some tech gurus. They found the right

match in another Toronto-area company, RedBit, a software consulting, design, and engineering business. RedBit took immediate stock of their client’s pain points.

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That need was only further exacerbated by COVID-19, which broke out mere months into War Child’s engagement with RedBit. On top of handling the dire realities of war zones, embedded teams now had to coordinate relief and various programs amid a raging pandemic. Laptops sputtering along with an outdated operating system just weren’t going to cut it.



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Well-timed updates

Recognizing the core transformative needs of security and improved communication, RedBit devised a five-year plan starting with a new server, an array of Windows 10 machines, and the full suite of Microsoft 365 productivity software connected to a corporate account. War Child documents could be housed on SharePoint and OneDrive as staff coordinated and held video conferences over Teams, doing away with the hodgepodge of miscellaneous apps and programs used in the past. And perhaps most importantly, the enhanced security and data protection RedBit enacted meant an extra level of safety for the victims of conflict that War Child help.

“All of the challenges identified in our discovery process were solvable by Microsoft 365,” said Mark Arteaga, president of RedBit Development, “and this was life-changing for the team at War Child Canada.”

The timing turned out to be fortuitous. With the worldwide bombshell of COVID about to change work life for the foreseeable future, War Child Canada decided to close their main office, dispersing employees. With everyone plugged in to a centralized network, disparate staff on opposite sides of the earth could maintain access to important information that would make helping displaced peoples more efficient.

“It's been able to bring people together more

consistently,” Corbridge said, “in a more consistent format in order for staff to communicate and work together in a collaborative platform.”

Making a difference

Perfectly timed and expertly executed, RedBit's support of War Child Canada earned them a finalist spot on the shortlist for Microsoft Canada's Industry Innovation Impact Award. For van der Werken, however, the greater reward is knowing her team helped make even a tiny difference for children and families around the world.

“Whether it be getting food into people's bellies that can't afford it,” van der Werken said, “or helping kids forced to flee their homes and leave behind everything they knew to actually live a normal life as a child, getting an education ... we're a small part of that, but we're helping to facilitate it.”

McLeod agrees that the extensive reworking of their technology is already yielding a tremendous impact.

“Whether it's revising event plans, changing program plans, worrying about our insurance, or worrying about our lease,” McLeod said, “to have a shared platform for communication (and) an ability to work on documents seamlessly together (removes) the hurdles that get in the way in those crisis times and those times of transition and those times of transformation.”

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