

Case Study

The Santa Cruz Museum of Arts and History Serves Its Community with Help from Cloud Brigade

<https://santacruzmah.org>



Summary

Customer Since 2018
Located in Santa Cruz, CA
Industry: Museums, Historical Sites
Small Business
Robb Woulfe, Executive Director
Founded in 1996, Non-profit

Challenge

Gaps in IT maintenance and support left the MAH in dire straits with a hacked website and locked-out accounts.

Benefits

- Network performance has been improved
- The website is more stable and secure
- IT systems have been stabilized and improved for the long haul
- Cloud Brigade has provided knowledge transfer to IT staff at the MAH

About the Santa Cruz Museum of Arts and History (the MAH)

The Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History (the MAH) is a creative hub of Santa Cruz County. It's a place where there's always something happening. All year long the MAH hosts truly "only-in-Santa-Cruz" events and exhibitions co-created with community partners. In 2011 the MAH changed the museum by changing its purpose: from being a place for art and history to a place that uses art and history to build community.

Background

The small staff at the MAH focuses outward on making the facility a great gathering place for the Santa Cruz community. The internal IT needs were a low priority until issues came up. As a Santa Cruz-based business, Cloud Brigade stepped in to tame the issues and assume the tasks of long-term IT maintenance and support.

Business Challenges Solved

- **Skills and Staffing Gaps** – The small staff is oriented toward museum operations instead of IT matters
- **Inefficient Systems and Processes** – A months-long gap in IT maintenance took its toll on business systems and the website
- **Business Bottlenecks** – Administrative accounts were inaccessible to current employees

Why Cloud Brigade

There was a short time when the museum was in between Executive Director's as well as several positions that maintained the technology infrastructure. Cloud Brigade was brought in to address some short- and long-term pain points while the museum searched for their new leader and filled the other positions. "They needed someone to keep things stable and solve some of the most critical issues until the new director could be hired," says Chris Miller, Founder and CEO of Cloud Brigade. "They appreciate that we are a local tech company who can solve a wide range of problems."

"Cloud Brigade came through for us when we needed it most. As we went through some executive transitions, our website and technology systems needed support and Cloud Brigade came in and sorted everything out, applied IT configurations, and fixed our time-sensitive issues."

– Chance Decker, Director of Development and Communications, Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History

Improving the Network and IT Systems for the Long Haul

The MAH's mixed-use complex includes their museum, a European-style café and market known as Abbott Square, and sublet office space. The network that provides connectivity across this sprawling complex includes a number of routers, switches, and wireless access points which must all work in unison. What's more, there are private aspects to the network as well as public segments that can be used by guests.

When Cloud Brigade assumed management of this network, the company first performed a discovery project to gain access to and understand the Ubiquiti UniFi network as well as the general layout of other components like network storage, backup, VoIP phones, and SaaS applications such as Microsoft 365 email and collaboration tools.

The first task undertaken to improve the network was migration of the Internet connection from wireless broadband to a newly launched fiber offering, both provided by Cruzio Internet. Although the MAH had a decent collection of IT documentation, they did not have staff members with the required level of technical knowledge to handle the migration, especially in the areas of mitigating downtime and addressing unexpected issues as they arose.

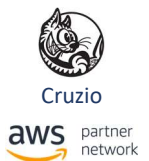
As staff members came and went over the years, key access and configuration information was still attached to old employee accounts, presenting some challenges in gaining access to various aspects of the network and applications. Cloud Brigade resolved these issues to ensure that accounts are always accessible to current employees. Then, as restrictions for the pandemic hit the MAH, employees began to work remotely. Cloud Brigade set up VPN access to keep people connected to their network and fully productive during their work-from-home period.

The MAH has a digital archival systems for exhibits and other materials that must be maintained and synchronized with a storage facility in the cloud. "We have to make sure the data is protected in the event the building falls down in an earthquake, so they have historical reference for all these cool art exhibits and projects they've done," says Chris Miller. Cloud Brigade adopted a multi-faceted network storage system to store the digital assets and provide a local backup system for network assets.

Technology

- **Software:** Craft CMS, PHP, Amazon Lightsail, Amazon S3, Cloudflare, imgix, MySQL
- **Hardware:** Ubiquiti Networks, Windows Server, Synology NAS

Partners



Services

- **IT Maintenance and Support** – Addressed numerous short-term "pain points" and assumed ongoing maintenance and support of the network and other systems
- **Website Maintenance and Support** – Mitigated a hacking attack and assumed ongoing maintenance and support of the website

A Hacker Took the Website Down on a Busy Holiday Weekend

Three years ago, the MAH engaged an outside marketing agency to design and develop a new website. The agency completed the development task and handed the new website over to museum staffers, but there was no plan for ongoing updates and support. Eight months later, the museum paid the price for overlooking software updates and regular maintenance: the website was hacked and was no longer visible to the public.

When the cyber-attack happened over a busy holiday weekend, Cloud Brigade received an automated alert that the museum's website was offline. Chris Miller notified Chance Decker, the MAH's Director of Development and Communications, that the website was in trouble. Miller worked with the original website developer to get through the complex technical issues and get the website back up and running as usual.

“That automatic notification that Cloud Brigade had set up was really helpful to getting us back online,” says Decker. “I think having the site go down uncovered more issues that showed how out of date we were in terms of updates for some of our plug-ins and the software itself.”

Following the hacking event, Cloud Brigade performed a discovery on the state of the website and underlying infrastructure and proposed an upgrade plan. The website hadn’t received software updates in some period of time, and as a result of complex changes to its content management software (CMS), it was not easily upgraded using the normal processes. Cloud Brigade worked with the MAH and the original web developer to identify the source of the issues, manage the upgrade process, and migrate the website to a more appropriate hosting solution that could better accommodate the CMS. With the website now stabilized and fortified, Cloud Brigade has assumed its ongoing maintenance and support.



“Cloud Brigade made some recommendations on changing our web hosting service and a few other things to stabilize our website and help it operate at its top capacity.”

– Chance Decker, Director of Development and Communications, Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History

Cloud Brigade Provides Knowledge Transfer and a Safety Net

Over the years, Cloud Brigade has assumed more and more responsibility over various aspects of the museum’s IT operations. “We’ve provided new employee onboarding services and support to staff to add new employees to the MAH’s email, voice system, Microsoft 365 suite, and computer systems within the office,” says Miller. “We’ve identified risk and mitigated potential failures of key systems in order to prevent outages and data loss. We’ve taken the systems off auto-pilot and ensure they are well managed and maintained.”

“Cloud Brigade has been there for us as issues have popped up. They are definitely our ‘go-to resource’ anytime we have something that needs to be resolved.”

– Chance Decker, Director of Development and Communications, Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History



Where feasible, Cloud Brigade sets things up and then turns over day-to-day operations to the IT team at the MAH. “They often show us what they did and how we can handle things ourselves going forward,” says Hans Wuerfmannsdobler, Director of Finance and Administration at the MAH. “We’ll figure out the things that are easy for us to handle and the frontline things we can troubleshoot ourselves and then leave the more complicated issues to Cloud Brigade. It might take us a few hours to figure something out, whereas Cloud Brigade can solve it in 10 or 20 minutes. We want to make the best use of our time.”

Ashley Holmes, Marketing and PR Manager at the MAH, is grateful for Cloud Brigade’s guidance. “When we first started, we didn’t know what we didn’t know. Chris really held our hands through everything and explained what they were doing so that everyone on our staff felt comfortable—even those of us without an IT background. He made us feel like we weren’t alone in these problems and we would be able to overcome the obstacles,” according to Holmes.