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Learning *curve*

Established in 1971, The Consortium is the largest independent supplier of education resources in the UK. With over 240 people at its HQ in Wiltshire and 30,000 products in their catalogue customer service was a challenge.



Consortium Call Centre

As the business grew and the number of staff and products lines increased the limitations of its 7-year-old TDM-based telephone system became a significant barrier to the future development of the organisation.

Business Support Director at The Consortium, Joe Caddell explains, "The problem with our incumbent system was its rigidity. For example, the call routing function was very cumbersome – to move staff from one type of call to taking another type, required them to log out of one queue and then log in to the next, resulting in missed calls. Maintenance was an ongoing headache and even simple configurations required a call to our thirdparty support organisation which was not only very expensive, but also time consuming. All of these restrictions had an adverse effect on our ability to react to the seasonal peaks that occur in our business. During these periods the number of calls can triple from around 500 to over 1500 a day. Management information was poor; we simply did not know how many potential sales calls we were missing."

A decision was made to replace the existing system. To ensure that the company made the correct investment a thorough and rigorous analysis of the products and technology currently available on the market was conducted.

Caddell explains, "We drafted a comprehensive 'Statement of Requirements' (SOR) that set out exactly what we needed from a new system. At this stage we were not

concerned at all with the technology itself, the critical factor was how the proposed solution would address and match our business requirements."

The SOR was sent to 12 potential suppliers, from which a shortlist of three was selected. Caddell describes the selection process, "Drawing up the short-list was not easy as the proposals from all the vendors had merit. The final selection however, was unanimous – a 'pure' IP PBX from Swyx, supplied by Swyx reseller GP Network Solutions."

The Swyx solution was implemented in two phases, firstly the call centre and then two weeks later the back-office was also moved onto the new telephony platform.

The Results

Once the system had been running for a couple of months, the project team carried out a comparative analysis of the system against their original business requirements. The analysis revealed the following:

The new call routing has enabled the company to capture almost every call that comes in – with call-backs to the few customers that were missed. According to The Consortium, this is now providing 'outstanding customer service'.

The improved flexibility means that the company can meet changing customer demand quickly, ironing out the seasonal and daily peaks by adding new users simply and quickly and routing calls according to skill-set.

Call recording has improved the quality of staff training – a facility that was price prohibitive on many of the competing solutions.

The enhanced management reporting has moved the company from the 'Stone Age' to one which can act dynamically on real-time data to improve and fine-tune every aspect of the business operation.

All 'moves and changes' (MACs) can now be carried out in-house.

Supports new business requirements such as multi-branding i.e. Answering calls in the name of a specific product line/brand.

Reduced overall running costs by around 25% and has achieved an internal return on investment of nearly 30%.

The ability to integrate their Infor System 21 ERP system in the near future to develop customer service, enhance their outbound new business campaigns and improve their customer retention.

Summary

Joe Caddell sums up The Consortium's experience of using the Swyx technology, "The project has been a complete success and has met all our selection criteria. We feel that we have only scratched the surface of what we can do with the system and it is now such an integral part of our business that our operation would suffer severely if we had to go back to our original TDM-based phone system."

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