

Newport City Homes

Enhances Microsoft unified communications deployment with state-of-the-art Aspect contact centre platform



Expected Results

- Improved customer experiences
- Faster and more accurate management decision-making
- Greater agent empowerment
- Agents able to leverage knowledge throughout the business via Presence

The Company

Newport City Homes (NCH) is a leading UK not-for-profit Registered Social Landlord created in 2009 after a stock transfer of approximately 9,200 properties from Newport City Council. Today, it serves over 10,000 residents, leaseholders and shared owners in the city.

The Business Challenge

In 2009, NCH's new Information Services (IS) team faced a huge task. Not only was it required to set up a completely new technology infrastructure (servers, storage, telephony, desktops) for the organisation's circa 350 staff, but it also had to implement new mission-critical applications (Finance, HR and Payroll, Housing Repairs) and migrate others from the local authority.

NCH's Board, Executive and staff were determined to introduce a culture of excellent resident services—and its FIRST values (Fair, Innovative, Respectful, Sincere and Trustworthy) shaped how the IS department and its services were built.

The Solution

At a network level, NCH adopted a 100Mb meshed network to link its three main sites, with broadband serving smaller offices and other sites; while in the front and back office, it invested in a range of Microsoft solutions including Microsoft Office, Service Manager, Microsoft SharePoint 2010 and Windows 7 on the desktop. In order to improve the quality of customer interactions, NCH also developed a sophisticated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system based on the Microsoft Dynamics 4.0 platform.

Choosing an appropriate, high quality, telephony solution was another key priority and NCH assessed a number of traditional and IP telephony solutions before choosing the Microsoft OCS (Office Communication System) system, now known as Microsoft Lync.

Microsoft Lync provides full Voice over IP (VoIP) telephony functionality with advanced features such as instant messaging, video and call conferencing, presence, call recording and speech recognition. It also provides tight integration with other platforms including NCH's Microsoft-based CRM system.

By December 2010, NCH's Lync system was handling around 15,000 instant messages, 25,000 incoming calls, 40,000 outgoing calls and 40,000 internal calls a month.

Serving Customer Needs

Having established its core telephony platform, NCH turned to its contact centre requirements – with the IS team seeking a sophisticated solution that not only satisfied the current needs of its residents but also provided the flexibility and advanced features to meet the needs of 'next-generation' residents.



This requirement became ever more urgent as the resident service centre expanded. When first opened, the centre was handling around 300 calls a day. By December 2010, however, its 13 Resident Service Agents were handling up to 1200 calls – plus emails – on a wide range of subjects from housing repairs to anti-social behaviour and property bids. The operation also plays a key role as an emergency out-of-hours centre for several other housing associations.

As Nigel Ward, Information Services Developer, comments, “Lync is an excellent communications system, but we needed the additional functionality of contact centre wallboards, on-hold music, skills-based call routing and other advanced customer contact features to create a truly world-class operation”.

After reviewing a number of specialist contact centre solutions that could integrate with – and complement – its Microsoft Lync and Microsoft Dynamics platforms, NCH selected the Aspect® Unified IP® platform product.

Aspect Unified IP delivers the advanced customer contact functionality NCH desired including wallboards, on-hold music, skilled-based routing, 100 percent and selective professional call recording, and a detailed management information (MI) system. An IT-ready .NET Web services platform, the product also assists NCH in uniting customer contact capabilities including inbound routing, outbound dialing, email/Web, and voice portal.

“We looked at many different solutions, but Aspect was the only one that gave us confidence to integrate with our existing Microsoft infrastructure and enable us to fully execute our unified communications strategy”, said Nigel Ward. “We anticipate the platform will play an important role in improving our contact centre efficiency and effectiveness”.

“We’ve been very impressed with Aspect through the implementation”, he added. “They have been very professional”.

Managing Customer Contacts More Effectively

Sian Brown, Resident Services Manager, Newport City Homes believes the new Aspect platform will improve experiences for both residents and NCH staff. “While our main aim was to improve resident experiences, it’s clear that the Aspect technology will also improve the efficiency of our agents and provide excellent management information for our management team too”.

“Through detailed MI we now know how many calls we’re handling, how long agents are taking on calls etc. enabling us to make more informed and speedier decisions”, said Sian Brown. “We’re also able to re-schedule staff to deal with peaks and troughs in call traffic. If we identify ‘quiet time’ when there are few incoming contacts, managers can now re-schedule agents to make outbound contacts to conduct research or to check on the wellbeing of our elderly or vulnerable residents”.

However, it is the tight integration between Aspect Unified IP, NCH’s Microsoft Lync-based unified communications system and its Microsoft Dynamics-based CRM system that really sets this system apart. Here are just a few of the benefits that NCH have realised:

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*- Sian Brown
Resident Services Manager
Newport City Homes*

- New Contact Centre agents can be added in just a couple of clicks on an existing Active Directory account rather than having to be registered separately. Close integration also permits Windows authentication methods thereby reducing responsive support costs and improving accessibility for agents.
- Management can rapidly add new customer options and adjust between live and automated services. During the recent cold snap, for example, an additional IVR option was added to the initial greeting menu for customers to access specialist heating, hot water and plumbing advice.
- Agents are now more empowered to deal with residents. A summary of relevant information is sent to agents from the CRM system just as contacts are delivered to their desktops. This covers everything from the residents’ history of dealing with NCH, to details on what services they have requested, outstanding activities and more. NCH focuses on ‘enabling’ its agents, not on drowning them with information.
- Close system integration has enabled new service and information possibilities. For example, by integrating its CRM and GIS systems NCH can pinpoint issues such as fly tipping and anti-social behaviour on a geographical basis – providing a depth of information that can improve customer experiences and provide solid evidence on which to base management decisions or legal measures.
- Presence is embedded into each case history enabling agents to see the status and availability of relevant housing, rent enquiry, new homes, or financial inclusion officers and contact them immediately by phone, web chat or email as needs dictate – and while the customer is on line. This permits agents to leverage knowledge throughout the organisation.

“The value of having a Presence system cannot be underestimated”, claims Nigel Ward. “Previously, if an agent needed to contact an external knowledge expert, they would have to dial telephone numbers not knowing where that person was or whether they were free to talk. This often increased the length of the call and the engagement time of the agent and added to caller frustration. With Presence, we can now reduce contact handling times, improve first call resolution and enhance customer satisfaction”.

Building on this success, NCH is planning on introducing a raft of new customer contact features by taking advantage of the advanced capabilities of the Aspect® Unified IP® platform. These include:

- Workforce optimisation: to improve the effectiveness of forecasting and workforce scheduling
- Automated outbound dialling: to conduct information updates (such as community safety alerts)
- Scheduled callback: enabling customers to request an automated callback from an agent rather than wait in queue
- Multichannel contact handling: extending customer choice to Facebook, Twitter and other popular communications channels

“Through its innovative use of Aspect Unified IP, Microsoft Lync 2010 and Microsoft Dynamics 4.0, NCH has created a highly effective customer contact solution that will deliver benefits for its customers, management and employees”, said Mark King, senior vice president, EMEA & Africa, Aspect. “We look forward to working with NCH in the coming months to enhance the platform as we look to improve management flexibility and service quality, and meet the multichannel demands of its ‘next generation’ customers”.

An Award-Winning Organisation

The success of NCH’s IS team in creating a world class computing and communications infrastructure was recognised at the 2010 UK IT Industry Awards when it was named ‘Small IT Department of the Year’. NCH also won the ‘Delivering Customer Driven Services’ and ‘People’s Choice’ awards at the 2010 Welsh Housing Awards.

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About Aspect

Aspect is the only software company with a fully-integrated interaction and workforce optimisation platform for enterprise contact centres globally that need to profitably (and seamlessly) orchestrate people, processes and touch points in an era when the contact centre is the new centre of the customer experience. For more information, visit uk.aspect.com.

