

Environment Agency gives green light to IBM customer service delivery strategy



Photograph: Environment Agency Image Library

Overview

■ The Challenge

- Environment Agency faced increasing customer enquiry levels, placing huge demands on the regional office network
- Needed to deliver efficiencies and consistency improvements
- Modernise existing structure to deliver increased responsiveness and efficiency

■ The Solution

- IBM Business Consulting Services selected to project manage the implementation of a complete systems infrastructure for the NCCC
- Centralisation of switchboard calls and customer enquiries through the NCCC

■ The Benefit

- Improved efficiency and quality of service through a new central telephone number for all enquiries – a saving of around £1m per year
- Delivered foundations for future project development, including provision of a multi-touch, multi-channel contact centre.

The Environment Agency is the public body tasked with improving and protecting the environment in England and Wales. It provides regulatory information and advice to the public as well as to commercial customers, answering a range of enquiries on everything from fishing permits to property searches. Faced with increasing demands on its network of over 40 regional/area offices, the agency needed to centralise customer contact provision. This would help it manage increased telephone and online enquiries. It would also satisfy demand for enhanced customer service flexibility and responsiveness – a key UK government priority.

Centralising customer management

The Environment Agency wanted to establish a new 65-seat National Customer Contact Centre (NCCC) in Rotherham. The new contact centre would deal with switchboard enquiries (which previously made up 50 per cent of the contact volumes to regional offices), property searches and product literature supply requests. Enquirers would be routed to specialist or regional offices if NCCC could not resolve their enquiries.

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– Liz Buckle, Head of Customer Contact at the Environment Agency

To realise its centralised customer contact strategy, the agency required a complete systems infrastructure to include a new telephone switchboard and computer telephony integration (CTI). A new customer relationship management (CRM) solution would also enhance enquiry management.

The agency had limited experience with large contact centre projects, so it chose to bring in an external provider to develop and project manage the new systems infrastructure’s implementation. “We wanted a partner that understood our business challenges and could meet our unique needs,” explained Liz Buckle, Head of Customer Contact at the Environment Agency. “We needed an organisation that could provide us with a clear project framework, re-engineered business processes and manage the third parties involved.”

Collaborative approach

The Environment Agency selected IBM from several leading providers to develop and project manage the whole process. The agency was impressed by IBM innovation and its industry expertise. IBM Business Consulting Services managed the interaction of multiple technology providers, including BT on the Avaya switchboard implementation, Genesys on the CTI, and Oracle on the CRM solution. The specialist experience of IBM consultants ensured the implementation ran smoothly – all potential issues were identified and resolved at an early stage.

The project's complexity increased with the requirement to integrate with the agency's Oracle environment, which was being deployed across the organisation in parallel with the NCCC. It established a standardised process for managing enquiries from 'cradle-to-grave' using the agency's Oracle CRM solution. This enables issue escalation to subject or geographic specialists. IBM also delivered a flexible and innovative approach to call-routing using scripts and intelligent voice response to enhance efficiency.

With the IBM solution in place, the NCCC now handles over 4000 contacts per day and can manage over four million calls annually. With the new NCCC, service consistency and efficiency has improved dramatically. Detailed reports provided by the telephone system enable management to make informed decisions on staffing levels as well as providing the agency with information that gives them a better understanding of the customers and their needs.

Organic growth for the future

Liz Buckle believes that the relationship with the IBM team was one of the keys to success. "It was a challenging project. What made it work for us was the trust built up between the agency and IBM. We developed an open and honest relationship."

IBM consultants are helping the agency realise its overall goal of making the NCCC a multi-touch, multi-channel contact centre. Further projects are planned as part of a wider e-government agenda. IBM is assisting the agency with business and legislative drivers, including new automated voice response and knowledge management strategies and addressing Freedom of Information act requirements.

Liz Buckle is confident of the continuing benefits of the collaborative relationship with IBM. "What we always wanted was to build a partnership that would last beyond day one of the project. We know the NCCC is going to grow and change and our requirements will evolve. We're sure IBM will help us meet these future challenges."

For more information

To find out more about IBM Business Consulting Services contact your IBM sales representative or visit:

ibm.com/services/bcs



IBM United Kingdom Limited

PO Box 41
North Harbour
Portsmouth
Hampshire
PO6 3AU
Tel: 0870 010 2503
ibm.com/services/uk

IBM Ireland Limited

Oldbrook House
24-32 Pembroke Road
Dublin 4
Tel: 1890 200 392
ibm.com/services/ie

IBM Nederland N.V.

Postbus 9999
1006 CE Amsterdam
Tel: 020 513 5151
ibm.com/services/nl

IBM South Africa Limited

Private Bag X9907
Sandhurst
2146
South Africa
Tel: 0860 700 777
ibm.com/services/za

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