Tech Case Study

Robust VoIP System Enhances Customer Service Levels For Print Solutions Provider

"We didn't think the old system had impacted our customer service at the time, but since getting the new system our call waiting times have massively dropped. Less people than ever before are complaining about being stuck on hold and never coming off, for example. And callers seem to be using it more efficiently, making call centre wrap-up times shorter so agents can speak to more customers." Craig Battel, Infrastructure Manager, M2

A new, robust VoIP system from Solar has enabled M2 to improve customer service levels and reduce cost, while bringing mobile employees closer to the centre of the business.

M2 sells an extensive variety of print solutions. Founded in 1992, the company now boasts five sites in Manchester, London, Glasgow, Wakefield and Trafford, and has an annual turnover of £35 million.

Originally, the company's communications infrastructure was based across four separate systems, with each site operating independently from the next. The eldest system was nearly 15 years old and maintenance costs were increasing. There was a mixture of analogue and digital lines, and just 10 VoIP telephones across the entire business.

The solution was causing a number of problems, from administration to invoicing and maintenance. The age of the system meant it was also limited in terms of what it could do. It wasn't capable of UC, it had no proper voicemail, no SIP, and it required more and more support.

In Manchester, the location of the main contact centre, the system was nearing its capacity of 120 extensions. Just 16 more lines would have cost M2 close to £1,000. Add to this a series of power outages in Manchester and Glasgow, the worst of which saw the main call centre out of action for two days, and it's easy to see why M2 started looking for an upgrade.

Time for a change

Two and a half years ago, M2 opened up its Wakefield office, installing a new ShoreTel solution from Solar Communications in the premises. This was a separate system from the other four sites, but M2 was able to transfer telecoms across MPLS. While the new ShoreTel system offered numerous benefits to the business, the old ones were becoming extremely difficult to manage. Craig Battel, M2's Infrastructure Manager, tells the story:

"We had separate maintenance contracts for all the hardware, and our oldest one was close to 15 years old. It was all a bit of a mess, with analogue lines mixed in with digital lines, and none of them working effectively. We had just 10 VoIP phones across the entire company.

"The system's age meant it wasn't capable of UC. It had no proper voicemail, it was a nightmare to manage, and had massive support contracts scattered here and there. It also wasn't capable of SIP, and it terms of operation, each phone had to have its own physical port on the system."

Improvements in customer service

The quality of the phone system left much to be desired from a manageability point of view, but M2 hadn't realised the impact it was having on callers and customer service levels.

Craig says: "We didn't think the old system had impacted our customer service at the time, but since getting the new system our call waiting times have massively dropped. Less people than ever before are complaining about being stuck on hold and never coming off, for example. And users seem to be using it more efficiently,

making call centre wrap-up times shorter so agents can speak to more customers."

Compelling change

M2 knew they required a new system but the real turning point was when they witnessed a series of outages across their Manchester and Glasgow sites.

Craig says: "An outage in our main office in Manchester, where our contact centre is, saw the system go down for two days. Obviously this was not good and it impacted our customer service levels. We then had the same power issues in Glasgow. It took a week to replace the power supplies and cost us a fortune."

Choosing the new system

M2 came to Solar with relatively low expectations for what they needed their new solution to do. They simply wanted to maximise the functionality of the old system as a minimum – essentially gaining a reliable solution with handsets that could dial out. What they got truly exceeded their expectations.

The print solutions company decided on a feature rich system with voicemail and instant messaging. M2 evaluated four different systems, including the ShoreTel solution they'd already chosen for the new Wakefield site. They looked at three partners and selected Solar based on experience and technical skill.

"We'd used Solar before so we knew their support was bob on," says Craig. "Choosing ShoreTel from Solar the cost was cheaper than the other prospective partners. We knew, having already been through deployment at the Wakefield site, that Solar would properly manage the project. In terms of support, their engineers are very knowledgeable. If there are any issues we simply log a support call and they get back to us within the same day at least."

For ease of deployment, M2 selected a VoIP solution, which can be managed from a web portal.

"This makes management easier," says Craig, who is responsible for the running of the system. "I'm able to make changes direct from users' PCs when I'm sat at their desks, rather than repeatedly coming back to my own computer like when we were using the old Samsung software."

Supporting a mobile workforce

One additional requirement came from M2's CEO, John Taylor, who wanted to bring the 60 field-based engineers closer to the business. The company made the decision to take the Shoretel mobility client too. So now remote engineers can have a desk extension on their mobile, making them a central part of the M2 team.

The project

The new phone system project started at the beginning of November 2014 and was completed by the 17th December. Craig says: "Solar were brilliant because this was relatively short notice for quite a large project. Even before the financials had been agreed but the project had been signed off, Solar were planning it and having deployment meetings. From a project point of view they were brilliant. The guys they sent in were really knowledgeable."

Saving time and money

M2 has witnessed both operational and time savings as a direct result of their new solution. Getting new users set up on the old phone system was a difficult and manual process. By contrast, adding extra users and handsets to the new system is extremely straightforward, so scaling the solution to cater for business growth is simple.

Additionally, the new ShoreTel system has its own contact software that runs on PCs, so the business runs much more smoothly. M2 teams no longer have to tediously update spreadsheets with telephone and extension numbers. Employees just click enter on the on-screen contact directory to make a call, which improves productivity.