

Cisco helps housing association put staff into the community, increasing personal contact

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
CUSTOMER NAME	· The Community Gateway Association
LOCATION	· Preston, Lancashire
INDUSTRY	· Public Authority
COMPANY SIZE	· 130 employees
BUSINESS CHALLENGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Use IT resources to increase operational efficiency · Increase face-to-face contact and communication with tenants · Make customer contact faster and more efficient
NETWORK SOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Cisco foundation network · Cisco Unified Communications system
BUSINESS RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Enables staff to work within the community more frequently · Improves customer services by making it easier to deal with sensitive issues · Improves operational efficiency and effectiveness

Community Gateway Association uses Cisco Unified Communications to increase face-to-face contact, improving customer communication and bring services and staff closer the community.

Business Challenge

The Community Gateway Association (CGA) was the first housing association in England to be set up as a 'community gateway'. This means the association places tenants and communities at the heart of its decisions, and gives local people lots of opportunities to shape the way the association is run. Indeed almost 50 percent of the CGA's management board is made up of tenants and many of the CGA's 600 shareholders are also tenants.

The CGA, a not-for-profit community business, was set up in 2005 to manage housing stock previously looked after by the local council. The CGA provides some 6,500 properties to people in and around the Preston area of North East England, including special needs housing. The CGA has 130 employees.

The CGA was a new organisation with a new building and many of its staff moved from Council offices, so it was able to adopt the latest innovation in communication and networking solutions. According to Paul Atkinson, resources director at the CGA, the strategy was to ensure that IT resources helped to increase efficiency

and effectiveness of the organisation and therefore delivered value for money. One of the key objectives for the CGA was to use technology to enable staff to work within the community and develop much greater face-to-face and personal contact with tenants.

Network Solution

The CGA decided to use Cisco as the sole provider for its data and voice communications. Aktinson says, "Despite being a private company we are like a public organisation and are still required to issue tenders for products and services. Although I am very familiar with Cisco technology, it was Cisco's reputation for quality, its capability to integrate voice and data into a single IP infrastructure and the functionality of the equipment that persuaded everyone at The CGA that Cisco would be the best solution."

The CGA has deployed a Cisco IP network system comprising Local Area Networks (LANs) at its head office and seven local offices connected via a Cisco Wide Area Network (WAN). The local offices are usually on CGA housing estates or in buildings acting as local management offices and contact points for tenants. The Cisco infrastructure also supports a Cisco Unified Communications system which supports 130 Cisco Unified IP phones across the network. This includes Cisco wireless handsets to enable staff to roam around the CGA's main office.



The hub of the CGA's telephony system is a 12-agent customer contact centre that manages calls from tenants covering repairs, rent enquiries, advice on benefits and other housing related issues. The contact centre handles 1,200 – 1,500 calls a month. Atkinson says an example of how Cisco enables effective integration is linking Cisco Unified IP handsets to agents' computers so that phones can be operated from the computer. For example, users can click on a phone number in an address book and that number is automatically dialled.

The Cisco solution at the CGA was implemented by Central Networks and Technologies, a Cisco Registered Partner, and 5i, a Cisco Premier Certified Partner.



Business Results

Cisco technology is a key part of enabling CGA staff to move out of their offices and interact with the community. The Cisco solution ensures offices on housing estates and home workers have direct access to housing and tenant information. The Cisco technology also helps to make staff more mobile.

Atkinson says, "Rather than getting our customers coming to us, we're encouraging and enabling staff to get out on to estates and meet tenants face-to-face. But in order to be effective, those staff need access to business systems like repairs databases or rent records so that whatever query gets thrown at them they can deal with it. The Cisco infrastructure and the applications that are able to run on it, helps those staff to use laptops and 3G cards to access information in real time while sitting in a tenant's home."

Atkinson says, "Rather than the traditional approach of tenants coming to the council housing office, we think it is more appropriate to take the service to the customer. We find there is a better response from someone in the comfort of their own home, especially for sensitive issues like rent arrears or anti-social behaviour."

Cisco technology is also helping to improve the work-home life balance for CGA staff by enabling them to work from home. Staff can now have a data connection to the CGA's internal network and systems from their home. But it also means they can use the same connection to make and receive calls at home, as if they were sitting in their office.

Atkinson says that one of the first benefits was to improve staff efficiency. For example, staff being able to manage all their calls from their desktop, see who has called and accessing the company directory from the handset are helping staff communicate with customers and one another more effectively.

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Paul Atkinson, Resources Director, The CGA

In the contact centre callers are now able to get to the right department quickly using flexible and intelligent routing. A pre-designated number, say for repairs, will be switched directly to the maintenance department. However, if no one is available the call will be diverted to an agent who will respond to the call immediately.

PRODUCT LIST
<p>Routing and Switching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco Catalyst 3560 Series Switches • Cisco Catalyst 3750 Series Switches • Cisco Catalyst 2950 LRE Series Switches • Cisco Aironet 1200 Series Wireless Access Points • Cisco 2801 Integrated Services Router • Cisco 2811 Integrated Services Router • Cisco 837 ADSL Broadband Router <p>Voice and IP Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco CallManager Version 4.1 • 130 Cisco Unified IP phones

The contact centre is building up a knowledge database based upon enquiries and responses to help improve customer service and the Cisco network ensure that this information is presented to agents quickly, so that they can deal with customer requests efficiently.

The CGA is planning to leverage the Cisco solution to deliver further efficiency improvements. For example, it is developing a SMS texting facility which will be able to send texts to tenants who may have overdue rent payments or to alert someone about an appointment a day or even an hour before the appointment time.

Atkinson says, "This kind of capability means that staff spend less time chasing up after late payments or turning up for meetings that a tenant may have forgotten about. The Cisco technology helps staff become more effective at getting the job done."



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