

CISCO IPT HELPS MIDLANDS HOUSING ASSOCIATION IMPROVE SERVICE TO CUSTOMERS

When Derwent Living chose a Cisco IP telephony system for its new head office, the company felt it had made a good decision. A year later, the choice was vindicated with significant improvements in customer service, cost savings and a very happy workforce as a result.

Cisco - the market leader in IP technology

Founded in 1964, Derwent Living is one of the leading providers of rental accommodation in the Midlands. It works closely with 30 local authorities to enable people such as the elderly, NHS key workers and students to live in affordable accommodation. The association also manages some commercial housing stock. It owns and manages around 8,000 properties comprising houses, flats, student halls and hostels. By the end of 2008 it hopes to increase its housing stock to 15,000. As well as existing properties, Derwent is also involved in regenerating run-down and deprived areas, which it redevelops to help meet local housing needs.

Derwent Living has always seen technology as a key tool in helping to manage operations, but also as a means of improving the service it delivers to people living in its properties. When Derwent Living decided to relocate its head office to a brand new building, it was a chance to review its entire network infrastructure and introduce new technologies.

The existing telephone and network infrastructure was inflexible, needed lots of cables and required engineers to be called out every time someone moved desk.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CUSTOMER NAME

- Derwent Living

INDUSTRY

- Public sector
(housing association)

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Customers rely almost entirely on the telephone to contact the association
- Relocation meant the opportunity to transform the IT infrastructure
- Existing telephony was difficult to manage and support
- Increase in mobile working needed better support

NETWORK SOLUTION

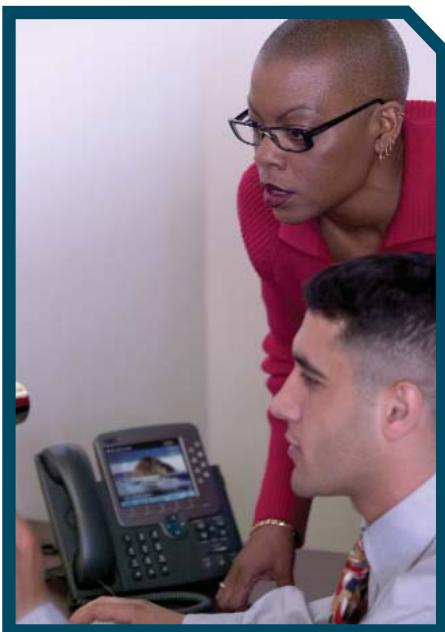
- Cisco IP voice and data network supporting 150 staff and a call centre

BUSINESS VALUE

- Customers get more efficient, informative service
- Easier to manage and monitor call centre activity
- Management and maintenance effectiveness delivers cost savings
- Established a future-proofed technology platform

"The Cisco IPT solution made the way we manage and improve customer service much more effective. We now have so much more information about how well we are communicating with, and providing information to customers."

Sarah Cresswell, ICT Manager
Derwent Living



"This move was only the third we've made in 40 years and the technology we had in the old building was nearing the end of its life," says Sarah Cresswell, ICT manager at Derwent Living. "As much as we can, we aim to use the most up-to-date technology and we had been considering IP for a while, so the new head office was an ideal opportunity to make a fresh start."

With staff spending more and more time away from the office - inspecting sites, monitoring repairs and visiting customers - and the need for hot desks increasing, Derwent Living also wanted to ensure that the new technology investment could expand in scale as demands changed. The company's strategy was to implement an IP network and telephone system in the new head office. The company looked at a number of suppliers for the IP solution and selected Cisco Systems.

"The IP strategy was a new route for us, so we couldn't really afford to be let down," says Cresswell. "I have enough things to worry about beside whether our telephony system is holding up, but when Lynx Technology presented the Cisco - solution, it filled me with confidence. Lynx Technology had previously provided us with a temporary solution at very short notice when one of our old phone systems failed at a remote office, so we felt confident that they would be able to deliver the Cisco solution for us. Cisco Technology is tried and tested and, for me, Cisco is the market leader."

Call handling more efficient with Cisco IPT

At its head office at Pride Park in Derby, Derwent Living has implemented a new voice and data network built using Cisco IP technology. It supports 150 permanent staff and around 30 mobile staff that use hot desks. A Cisco-supported VPN links up around 20 remote sites to the head office. Over the network infrastructure, Derwent Living has implemented a Cisco IP telephony solution comprising Cisco AVVID, Cisco CallManager and Cisco Unity. By the end of 2005, the Cisco IPT solution will be extended to the remote offices. The company is currently using voicemail, but expects to activate Cisco's unified messaging capability, particularly for remote workers.

The Cisco IP telephony system underpins Derwent Living's call centre. It is now possible to route calls to specific Customer Service Advisers (CSAs) so calls are responded to more effectively. For example, a dedicated line can be set up before each academic year so that students looking for accommodation in the area are connected directly to staff who know about student housing.

Cisco's extension mobility feature means that when mobile staff come into the head office to work, their personal extension number follows them to any hot desk. Previously, they would have to tell reception which desk they were at every time they moved.

Cisco technology proves its worth

"The telephone system is very important, especially to our customers. It is one of the main ways for them to communicate with us, so it's essential it works effectively," says Cresswell. "We've had the Cisco IPT solution in for a year and my confidence in the solution has proved to be right, it has been very good."

Derwent Living aims to provide its customers with a one-stop-shop service whenever they communicate with the company. The Cisco solution has been fundamental to supporting the way Derwent Living CSAs react and respond to customers. "The Cisco IPT solution made the way we manage and improve customer service much more effective. We now have so much more information about how well we are communicating with, and providing information to customers," says Cresswell.

It is now possible to determine how many calls each CSA is handling, how long it takes to complete a customer enquiry and where the call is coming from so that advisers have the information they need to respond more effectively. "If we find that calls are taking less than a minute, our one-stop-shop service probably isn't working. Knowing that means we can provide agents with more of the right information or training if it is needed," says Cresswell.

The Cisco IPT solution is also helping Derwent Living save money by reducing the amount of IT support required and the number of times engineers need to be called out to perform office relocations. Cisco IPT is now being rolled out to the company's 20 remote offices and will immediately increase savings by eliminating the cost of calls between offices.

Cresswell says because the Cisco IPT solution is simple to use, many tasks that used to require a skilled technician can now be handled by any member of staff.

"The introduction of the Cisco IPT system has been a great success at Derwent, the staff absolutely love it and I am sure if I even joked about removing it there would be uproar," she says. "By introducing Cisco technology into our new head office, we have laid a foundation for the future; the doors are open to where we want to go. We have continued our partnerships with Lynx Technology to ensure we can fully harness future development of the Cisco IPT system. The solution has enabled us to glue together our business systems so we are can start to improve and increase the level of service we provide to our customers. Cisco has made life a lot easier for us."



When Cisco presented its solution, it filled me with confidence.



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