



UK Government Agency Cuts Travel Costs and Boosts Productivity

Innovate UK uses Cisco solutions to deliver the first digital Innovation Funding Service

About Innovate UK

[Innovate UK](#) is the UK's innovation agency. The organisation works with people, companies and partner organisations to find and drive the science and technology innovations that will grow the UK economy.

With around 300 staff and a head office in Swindon, Innovate UK works across the UK and internationally. Since 2007, the organisation has committed over £1.8 billion to innovation projects, and a similar amount in partner and business funding. To date Innovate UK has helped more than 7,600 organisations bring their projects to fruition, which have in turn added over £11.5 billion to the UK economy and created 55,000 jobs.

The challenges

Improving communication and collaboration

Many government departmental IT systems are tightly regulated and locked down due to security requirements. Innovate UK works very differently, however, as its success is heavily dependent on regular, open communication with partners, organisations, and scientific and technology innovators from across the UK and beyond.

“In many ways, we operate more like a sales organisation than a government department, with many of our staff on the road and rarely in the office, while others work remotely,” says Nigel Townley, Director - IT & Business Change. “When I arrived three years ago, the methods of communication and collaboration available to us were very limited.”

This resulted in many people having to travel for face to face meetings, incurring unnecessary expense and travel time.

Supporting agile delivery

In 2015, Innovate UK embarked on the development of a digital service to support its Innovation Funding Competitions – the Innovation Funding Service (IFS). Developed using an agile delivery model, IFS is closely aligned to the Government Digital Service (GDS) [Service Standard](#), a series of criteria devised to help government departments and agencies create and manage effective digital services.

In order to deliver IFS successfully, multiple development teams were convened, each delivering a specific aspect of the service in an agile way. However, it soon became clear that bringing everyone together in the same location every day for regular agile ceremonies or stand-ups was not viable and had begun to incur significant travel costs and reduce productivity.



The solution: Cisco WebEx collaboration

With a background in IT, Nigel's first task was to help people – staff, businesses and partners – make better use of their time and communicate more effectively and easily. Increasing the use of video for internal/external meetings and event briefings could save time and travel costs, and make it easier to connect with colleagues, businesses and other government departments.

Having assessed the organisation's existing video capability, he concluded that a more powerful, secure and robust option was required, and chose Cisco® WebEx® solution for online web collaboration and webinars. In the case of agile stand-up meetings, Cisco WebEx® combined with Cisco Collaboration Meeting Rooms (CMR) made it possible for industry-leading Cisco TelePresence® endpoints to participate in Cisco WebEx conferences, providing a high-quality virtual meeting experience.

The benefits

Superior flexibility and much more

“Cisco WebEx with CMR was the obvious choice for many relatively small but very significant reasons, all of which have resulted in a smoother TelePresence experience for users,” says Nigel Townley.

“For example, the dial-in process is very straightforward for participants, making it easy to connect straight in to the right meeting

centre from any device. It's also very easy for our staff to create and launch meetings, and invite participants to their personalised virtual meeting room.

“Screen sharing is natural and the Microsoft Outlook plugins are simple to implement and very easy to use. The video quality is excellent, which is particularly useful when hosting our briefing events, and its scalability means that 500 or more participants can dial into any single meeting. In addition, the pricing structure has also made this a very viable option, making it possible for everyone to have a WebEx account.”

Improved team and external communications

18 months on, most staff are very comfortable using Cisco WebEx, which is helping enhance working relationships. For example, daily stand-up meetings now use a combination of video and face-to-face communication, allowing all staff to come together to share ideas and give progress reports on their individual projects.

The technology has also helped in other ways, as Nigel explains:

“Our main IT supplier is WORTH IT, which is located in The Hague and has a partner in Sheffield. Regular face-to-face meetings would have been both challenging and extremely costly, but Cisco WebEx with CMR has allowed us to work closely and communicate regularly and flexibly.”

ROI

In-house research carried out by Innovate UK during initial rollout using staff surveys found that Cisco WebEx had dramatically cut the amount of time previously spent travelling to attend meetings in person, enabling employees to make better use of their time. It also resulted in greatly reduced travel costs, as well as improving the process for events and competitions.

Overall, the combined savings from licence fees, travel costs and time were estimated to be around £40,000 per month. Conference call charges for example, were reduced by £5000 per month, while just over £15,000 was estimated to have been saved in travel and accommodation costs. In addition, using data obtained from employees also reduced travel expenses, with savings of about £19,700.

The IT team at WORTH agrees.

“WORTH is a small business with 50 employees,” says its director, Mark McNally. “We design and engineer digital products and services for clients and have been using Cisco TelePresence for the past 18 months.

“I must admit we only started using the Cisco EX90 and Cisco WebEx because it was a requirement of our client, Innovate UK, and when we first received the unit, we assumed the system did exactly the same as a MacBook and Skype. However, we have been converted; the quality of the image and the sound makes all the difference. We work remotely with multiple teams across the Netherlands and the UK and the Cisco systems comes closest to making us feel we are all in the same room when we meet online. We have now invested in Cisco systems for all of our meeting rooms.”

The future

“We’ve come a long way in the three years since I joined Innovate UK, but there is still a lot more to achieve,” says Nigel Townley. “For example, I would like to see video conferencing used even more extensively throughout the organisation, although I understand that, for some people, changes in working patterns can take time, and that some individuals feel more comfortable working this way than others.

“Innovate UK chose Cisco WebEx because it provides the right technology for our specific needs and offers a flexible, cost-effective solution that allows every staff member to have their own account, therefore making it available across the organisation.”

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www.innovateuk.gov.uk

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Innovate UK