



CITIZENS ADVICE CASE STUDY

Hybrid Phone System



Cost reduction, ready scalability, ease of use and trusted support

Background

Established in 1939 as an emergency war service, the Citizens Advice service has developed into the UK's largest independent advice provider. A Citizens Advice office in the local community means that people will always have somewhere to turn to in times of crisis. As such, it's estimated that 40% of people in the UK will use Citizens Advice at some point in their lives.

The Citizens Advice Hertsmere aims to provide the advice people need for the problems they face and campaigns to improve policies and practices that affect people's lives. This advice on rights and responsibilities is available to everyone and is free, independent, confidential and impartial.

Offering information and advice through face-to-face, phone and email services, and online via Adviceguide.org.uk Citizens Advice Hertsmere assists with wide ranging issues including debt, welfare benefits, employment, housing and immigration. Their advisers assist clients to complete forms, write letters and negotiate with creditors. In some cases they will act for clients and represent them in legal proceedings.

Hertsmere Citizens Advice is funded primarily by Hertsmere Borough Council. This funding covers the core services and some debt casework for people who live or work in Hertsmere. Smaller streams of funding are supplied through Hertfordshire County Council, Clarion Group Housing, Martin Lewis Projects, Aldenham Parish Council and the Rowlandson Foundation.

It is essential that the acceptance of funding from organisations does not influence the Citizens Advice Bureau's independence in being able to act on behalf of a client "against" the funding organization, should the need ever arise. And, like all local Citizens Advice, Hertsmere is a member of Citizens Advice, the national body. The local offices have considerable autonomy, but to remain a member of Citizens Advice, they must adhere to the quality standards, policies and principles of that body.

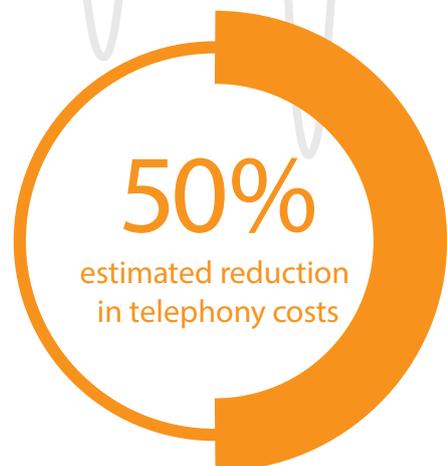
A Need For Change

Citizens Advice Hertsmere have 3 sites and communication between these sites although not essential is certainly useful. Each site has the advice line, and an essential part of the service is to have this line available to callers at given times. Cost was also a factor, solution was paramount but at the right cost. The less money spent means more can be used on providing services to Citizens Advice users.

With clear lines of communication being the very lifeblood of a successful Citizens Advice Office operation, making the right choice when selecting a new telephone system becomes critically important. The solution, the service and the support were the key requirements but also the rationalisation and simplifying the billing, making redundant what wasn't needed or required. CEO Carolyn Buller takes up the story.

"Over many years, the telecoms weren't necessarily reviewed or updated but added to, we had several companies providing different aspects, we had bills for services and we didn't know what these services related to. We knew we had to do something and approached our current providers, amongst others, we also spoke with Flip who were recommended."

With all these factors in mind Flip proposed a single hybrid system that can service all three sites.



VOICE
SERVICES



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The Contenders

The next task for Citizens Advice Hertsmere was to contact potential partners; the current provider along with two others. One of the two others were Flip Connect who had come recommended by Hertsmere's current and trusted IT provider.

The first two providers provided proposals. Where Flip differed was the refusal to simply provide a proposal without knowing the facts, providing a system without knowing the extent of what is already there would simply add to the issues of more services and more bills. Flip sent an engineer to the 3 sites and performed an audit, crossed referenced against the bills, provided a report to Citizens Advice Hertsmere and also a proposal and migration plan based upon these findings.

Flip and Citizens Advice Hertsmere now know what does what and we both have documentation relating to these services provided. We managed to cease several lines by porting the numbers onto the main lines, sharing circuits or simply ceasing a service we were confident wasn't being used.

Conclusion

Due to the complexity of the install and there being three sites the project was broken down into stages, the system was installed onto the legacy ISDN30 and basic training provided. The numbers were then ported at a later date to SIP and the system was configured accordingly.

The new system was installed and Citizens Advice Hertsmere have a system that provides all the functionality required, unused services have been ceased and Citizens Advice Hertsmere have a trusted telecoms partner that provide the support and service previously lacking.

Put simply the result is a better service with a lower cost.

Benefits

- ★ Estimated 50% reduction on telephony costs.
- ★ SIP connects employees throughout the region, with scalability to expand as required.
- ★ All services audited and documented.
- ★ Vastly increased end user functionality.
- ★ Unused services ceased, allowing further cost savings.
- ★ Users now have the ability to monitor each other, across 3 sites.

“It was an absolute pleasure to work with a company that offers such an invaluable service for our local community. I'm sure the money saved by Flip will mean even more people can benefit from their expert advice.

Ben Smith, Operations Director.

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