

Case Study

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council: Siemens connects Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council with the benefits of its HiPath ProCenter contact centre solution

As an excellent council, Blackburn with Darwen likes to be at the forefront when it comes to customer service. With this in mind, the council decided to purchase a new contact centre system that would give it the flexibility and control to deliver a truly citizen-centric service. The council went out to tender and after a rigorous process appointed Siemens.

The task

Provide a contact centre solution that offers reporting facilities, user friendliness and multi-channel capabilities

The solution

- Siemens HiPath ProCenter Enterprise
- VIP Unified Messaging Solution
- ComputerTel Orion Professional Voice Recording

The benefit

- Staff working patterns and skills can be matched with busy periods
- The number of calls and abandon rates have fallen - the Cleansing helpline (previously the most complained about service) has seen call abandon rates fall from 40% to 3% - and this has had a knock-on improvement for other services
- Agents can manage their own time, rather than rely on team leaders to delegate administrative work, due to the visibility HiPath ProCenter delivers
- Staff multi-skilling has delivered savings of 35%
- Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council can raise its profile and generate revenue by extending the benefits of its contact centre out to other councils
- Holistic management of the council's Voice needs has improved the service offered to citizens

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Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (BwDBC) is based in the North West region of England and serves a population of around 140,000.

In common with many other councils, BwDBC has been moving to enable all its public services to serve its local citizens more effectively. One of the ways in which the council has responded to the government is by investing in a contact centre to efficiently deal with citizen correspondence via voice, email and other channels of communication.

Finding the right contact centre Solution

Initially, the authority used an IP-based contact centre solution on its network, but the council found that it did not provide the functionality or user friendliness BwDBC wanted. For example, email could not be supported without further investment.

As a result, BwDBC decided to find a new provider and issued a tender to the marketplace. Siemens' contact centre offering, HiPath ProCenter, was identified as meeting BwDBC's requirements in providing telephony, email and Webchat through one channel, and, consequently, Siemens was one of five vendors shortlisted. The council already had a long-standing relationship with Siemens, which had supplied its voice network.

"We invited each candidate to come in and present the business benefits and show how they would meet our needs. This then went down to a shortlist of two and Siemens was the successful candidate," says Ross McQueen, Contact Centre Manager at BwDBC. "We chose Siemens because of our existing relationship and the reliance it offered of a worldwide organisation. Siemens is well known and also in the top quartile of Gartner's magic quadrant for contact centres which is reassuring."

The Siemens LifeWorks vision also mirrored what the council wanted to achieve in terms of an end-to-end solution to prevent a fragmentation of communications, help increase productivity and better serve end-users.

A swift implementation

It was only a matter of eight weeks after Siemens' appointment was announced that the first calls were delivered through ProCenter. McQueen admits that it made life easier having Siemens' engineers on hand throughout the implementation.

Since then, a Siemens engineer has been on-site once a week and its helpdesk has been on hand to tackle any problems. "We never have to chase Siemens. They have a very proactive approach," says McQueen. He also has praise for the non-intrusive manner of Siemens' sales teams.

"With most sales people you find they give you the initial sales pitch then you never hear from them again," he jokes.

"But we speak to our account manager once a week, and it is never 'what can I sell you', but instead it's genuine interest in how our project is going".

BwDBC offers 15 different services and those with the highest call traffic come through the contact centre. These include the Cleansing helpline (which deals with environmental issues, refuse and recycling etc.), the Revenue and Benefits service (dealing with housing claims, council tax enquiries etc.) and Parking Services. Services that the council is looking at including in the contact centre in the future include Children's Services and Libraries.

In the meantime, however, ProCenter is still providing benefits to areas, such as Social Services, by monitoring calls and building up a picture of call volumes.

"During the implementation of the solution, there were more Siemens people in the contact centre than employees, which was very reassuring!"

The council is keen to keep improving on their high standards. ComputerTel Orion Professional Voice Recording is used to monitor calls for training purposes, so staff can be familiarised with a wide variety of requests and scenarios. These recordings can then be used for quality management, helping to ensure a high level of customer satisfaction.

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Siemens opens the door to new Benefits

HiPath ProCenter is delivering the council plenty of benefits. "ProCenter is a flexible solution providing us with easy day-to-day management of the system," starts McQueen. "If I want to add a new user, queue or skill onto the system it takes us a couple of minutes, giving us the opportunity to react to any situation that arises. We are pretty much self-sufficient in terms of what we can do."

"We have just delivered next year's council tax bills and, consequently, were receiving enquiries to the Council Tax helpline," he tells. "70% of calls were about two types of query, so we created a new message that answered these two queries, which significantly reduced call volumes. It took us half an hour and speed is something that is key to us. We cannot predict things such as the weather, but we can respond to it and put a message on our helplines. For example, when it snowed this winter, we put a message on the Cleansing helpline to say that snow had delayed services by a day or two. We have to reach out quickly and the system helps us do that."

The integration between Siemens' ProCenter and its voice network has enabled the council to take advantage of a number of additional features. As with Social Services, for example, the council can measure call volumes and create profiles of the busy times people call the service. "Before, this would have required lots of programming and it would have been an additional cost," notes McQueen.

Some services have seen a significant improvement since they were delivered through the contact centre. The Cleansing helpline, for example, which previously handled 60,000 calls a year, was the service most citizens complained about.

It had an average abandon rate of 40%, but since introducing the contact centre, this has fallen to less than 3% and call volumes have peaked to around 40,000, as the council is dealing with calls more efficiently. This has had a knock-on effect for other services, as people would ring the council switchboard if they could not get a response from the helpline. As a result, there has been a dramatic fall in the number of calls to the switchboard.

The management reporting in ProCenter has empowered agents as they can now monitor their own performance and see what other agents are doing, which helps them identify suitable quiet periods to complete administrative work. "We did not have that visibility before, so team leaders had to delegate administration, but now the agents can do it themselves." McQueen says that multi-skilling alone - each agent deals with up to five services - has delivered savings of 35%.

It also avoids duplication of information as an agent can cover two separate but similar departments, such as the Cleansing and Neighbourhood Services departments. "Furthermore, with ProCenter we can use skill sets and priorities to route calls through to the relevant people," says McQueen.

"From a management information perspective, I can analyse our performance so we can see when calls are coming in or how many staff are online at one time," continues McQueen.

"Through this, we have been able to build shift patterns. Our busiest time is 10 to 11 o'clock in the morning and 4 to 5 o'clock in the after-noon. As the peak time in the morning coincided with our morning breaks, we have rescheduled these to make sure we are able to meet customer demand."

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