

Managed Service – Herefordshire and Worcestershire
Chamber of Commerce,



Scalable Systems Meet New Challenging Needs

Chamber of Commerce saves time and money with more responsive system



“We developed a close partnership with Cantono. Their support desk team were an extension to the IT department.”

Rayhana Rahman, Development Manager

Business Challenge

Following the devolution of the public sector and a significant reduction in the funding in 2000, the Chamber was forced to evaluate its Information Technology model. With reduced funding and an increasingly competitive environment, the Chamber concluded that an IT department well into double figures was unsustainable for an organisation of their size.

Costs under pressure

The burden of cost associated with a disproportionately large IT infrastructure was compounded by additional IT related issues that meant that maintaining the status quo was almost untenable.

Technology updates a problem

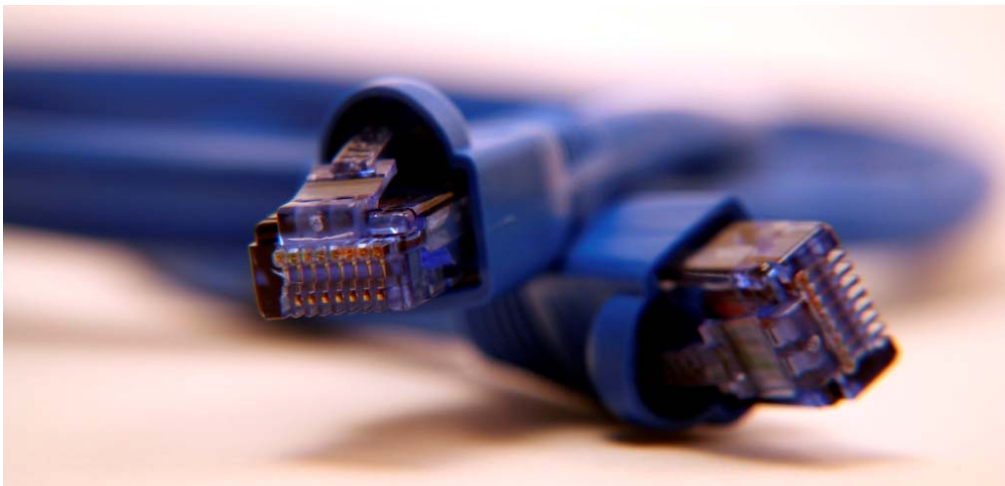
These issues included regular delays in the roll out of new technology, an identifiable risk in the Chamber's reliance upon individuals' knowledge in keeping the infrastructure running and a belief that whilst IT management remained an internal function, it would always be considered a burden.

Organisation Description

Chamber of Commerce Herefordshire and Worcestershire is one of the UK's largest accredited Chambers and also holds responsibility for managing the Business Link West Mercia franchise until April 2007.

A truly multi-disciplined organisation, the work of the Chamber involves collaboration with central government, local authorities, individual members and a vast array of service providers across a large and extremely diverse region, including heavily industrial areas, new towns and some of the most deeply rural parts of England..

With 125 employees split across four offices, the Chamber and Business Link West Mercia look after the interests of some 52,000 businesses in the region, of which the vast majority are small enterprises with less than ten staff.



“Whichever way we looked at our IT infrastructure, it appeared to be cumbersome, expensive and slow in helping the Chamber keep up-to-date with the latest technology.”

Rayhana Rahman, Business Systems Development Manager.



The Business Requirements

With an unsustainable IT infrastructure, the Chamber had a very clear grasp of how they needed to move forward.

This understanding was developed not only by their experience to date, but also through a comprehensive Business Process Review that analysed the Chamber's needs, both current and future, what their options were and the predicted gains of each alternative would be.

In short, the review concluded whichever path the Chamber followed, the solution needed to be:

- Cost Effective
- Flexible
- Scalable
- Responsive
- Robust

In addition to these attributes, the solution would also need to be able to support a multitude of business-critical applications that underpin the Chamber's operation, including financials, client management, email services, document management and voice over IP telephony.

The Solution

Cantono's managed services business was selected to deliver the Chamber's favoured managed service solution

The managed service model is designed to deliver either thick client / server applications or thin client web applications, in this case through a thin client model. The system integrates all of the business applications at the Chamber, providing high levels of performance, reliability and security.

Business Process Re-Engineering

Cantono's tried and test methodology is centred around the conviction that business processes should be identified and evaluated independently of the technology required to perform those functions. Only then is it possible to select and implement appropriate and relevant technology that will meet business requirements effectively and efficiently.

As part of this methodology, prior to embarking on the design of a managed service for the Chamber, Cantono undertook a business process re-engineering exercise mapping the organisation, their people, their roles, functions and processes. Once this exercise had been completed,

Cantono deployed a totally flexible system with high transaction capability through linked applications that are fed into a large SQL database. All of Herefordshire and Worcestershire's business processes were fully automated and delivered through the desktop PC.

Development work needed

A significant amount of development was involved in the project which included integrating Microsoft and additional third-party applications (such as the existing accounting system). The Herefordshire and Worcestershire managed service solution is fully integrated in design and the end result is in fact a series of individual components that have been integrated to provide a solution that fits the specific needs of the Chamber.

Project team of Stakeholders formed

A project team made up of key stakeholders was formed to commence the development of the system. Considerable time and attention was given to gaining an understanding of exact business needs and processes required by the users of the system. In-depth interviews were conducted with key members of staff to determine how the deployment of a Managed Service could support them in their day-to-day business.

Whilst the Business Process Re-Engineering review highlighted ways to streamline the Chamber's working practices, it was also vital for the Cantono solution to reflect the needs of the Chamber's workflows rather than for the Chamber to adopt prescriptive business processes defined by the solution itself.

KnowledgeDesk

Drawing upon nearly a decade of bespoke application development, Cantono created KnowledgeDesk, accessed via Citrix for the Chamber, and based around Microsoft SQL and VB. KnowledgeDesk is a full Business Support application that allows chambers of commerce and business links to manage all their activity seamlessly through a single customer centric solution.

It includes client management, enquiry diagnostics, one-click solution delivery, full order-processing, membership-management, campaign and event management by integrating Voice Over IP telephony, document and knowledge management, accounting and the Microsoft Office Suite.



Diverse needs handled

KnowledgeDesk has enabled the Chamber of Commerce Herefordshire and Worcestershire to support diverse needs including provision of information (for example on the food and drink industries), support for new business, and employee training. These benefits were felt most strongly when the collapse of the Rover Cars group in 2005, which along with its suppliers, was a major employer in the region, created a huge demand for retraining and related advice. In addressing this, KnowledgeDesk helped to support Skills Station provide a solution in Herefordshire and Worcestershire for all the training demand.

Implementation

The phased development and implementation was designed to deliver faster return on investment for the Chamber, although as with many technology projects, not everything went according to plan first time round. A trial “go live” with selected users proved to be a huge success, but on increasing the deployment to all users, minor areas of failure were identified as Rayhana highlights,

“We’re a dynamic and forward thinking organisation and we recognised the value an integrated Software as a Service model could bring to our business, enabling us to improve operating efficiency, keep up to date with leading technology and open up lines of communication and interaction between the distinct business units at the Chamber and with our partners.”

Christine Jones, Chief Executive Officer

“The implementation wasn’t a complete success the first time around, but what filled us with confidence was the manner in which Cantono dealt with resolving technical difficulties. Within two weeks, we were back on track. In our eyes, the ability to respond quickly and effectively to unexpected problems is what differentiates an average partner from a great one.”

On the whole however, the task of moving from old infrastructure to a new managed service was a huge success, achieved, moreover on just over half of the original budget.

Included in this process was an integration project that coincided with the deployment of the managed service, and related to the inclusion of the county of Shropshire into the Chamber’s remit. This required a transfer of significant volumes of data from the Shropshire infrastructure to the new Chamber client management system and the challenge of migrating contact details, history and links for 20,000 companies from Lotus Notes was handled seamlessly by the Cantono project team



Benefits

The SaaS model provides:

- the streamlining of IT processes
- significant time and management cost savings
- simple budget management
- the elimination of concerns surrounding licences, version upgrades, hardware capacity and application management.

With the impending development of a client portal this will give external businesses an alternative route to establish contact with the Chamber allowing clients the ability to access a multitude of information via the Internet, further reducing costs. As Rayhana explains:

“We developed a close partnership with Cantono. Their support desk team were an extension to the IT department”. More specifically she welcomed such benefits as the fact that “you don’t have to upgrade. Somebody does it for you.” and the success in avoiding viruses. “It’s not luck. It’s people being there to resolve problems, who have experience and an understanding of what you do.”

• Benefits to staff

The Managed services solution, which makes it almost immaterial where workers are located has also made it easier to adopt more flexible, efficient and family-friendly work practices, including increased home-working. Above all, she found that when new users started accessing the system “they come in and tell you that it is much better than what they had before”.

• The Future

The far reaching business benefits brought about by the Managed Service model combined with its reliability, robustness and scalability have enabled both parties to consider marketing the suite of applications that have been integrated into a KnowledgeDesk to other Chambers of Commerce.





Summary

With Cantono Managed Services, the Chamber of Commerce now have a solution which:

- Offers full 24 availability with guaranteed 99.95% uptime
- Has a Known, predicible costs
- Provides ignificant time and management cost savings
- Can be run on any hardware, any specification
- Is fully scalable
- Is available through Internet access, fixed communications links and ISDN dial-up
- Provides enterprise use of applications and collaboration of data
- Has a lower Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)
- Removes of concerns surrounding licensing, version upgrades, hardware capacity and application management
- Creates a virtual organisation linking people, offices and branches to a single solution
- Includes 24 hour helpdesk, support and maintenance
- Provides High levels of resilience and industry-leading standards
- Is cost Effective
- Is flexible
- Is scalable
- Is responsive
- Is robust

“In our eyes, the ability to respond quickly and effectively to unexpected problems is what differentiates an average partner from a great one.”

This solution was originally provided by iRevolution, which is now part of Cantono.

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