



Gravesham Borough Council improves productivity and customer access



Gravesham Borough Council is located 25 miles from central London and situated on the south bank of the River Thames. The borough is located in the Thames Gateway and the main driver in shaping its future will be economic regeneration and an ambition to build on the strengths of existing communities.

The Project – Communications Infrastructure

In 2006 the Council undertook a large office refurbishment programme that involved the consolidation of more than 350 staff into a single building – a project that afforded the Council the opportunity to completely update its communications infrastructure. As the Council's preferred provider of telecommunications solutions and services, IP Integration played a key role in ensuring that citizens could continue to access council services during the transition.

Darren Everden, the Service Manager for IT, observed that "the installation was complex as we were basically 'living' in the building whilst it was being refurbished which meant that we were constantly moving staff around. As we refurbished a floor we would move the staff back in and start work on another area. As a result for a long time we had staff working on the old telephone system while others were being transferred to the new Communications Manager."

The IP Integration solution design had to be both innovative and flexible. It needed to be able to cope with the difficult transition process, but more importantly, it needed to be an enterprise class communications solution that would support and enable the Council's strategic ambitions for the delivery of greater customer access. David Glasgow, Sales Director at IP Integration explains: "Moving staff from different buildings into just one required a complete upgrade of the existing wiring infrastructure. We recommended that the Council consolidate the separate voice and data networks on to one integrated structured cabling system that would carry all communications traffic. The way we designed the network, with a fibre optic backbone between all floors, meant that it made sense for the Council to deploy Voice over IP (VoIP) technology from day one. However, because the existing PBX was not capable of supporting IP based communications, we recommended that the council deploy an Avaya Communications Manager solution - which in our experience is the most effective communication telephony solution for the needs of the Council. This allowed us to manage the whole

transition process smoothly and efficiently and with no negative impact on the Council's day to day operations. We set up temporary links between the old system and the new Avaya. These links were transparent to users and callers alike and once we had a majority of users on the new system the exchange lines were transferred over."

Enhanced Customer Access

With the state-of-the-art communications infrastructure in place, the Council was well placed to implement service enhancement and customer access initiatives. For those that had a technology dimension, IP Integration proved itself to be a trusted partner, providing sound advice and good service. According to Darren Everden, "IP Integration is an unusual communications provider in that they have their own in-house team of software developers, CTI Labs, who have produced a range of value added applications that are wholly integrated into telephone systems such as the Avaya Communications Manager."

The CTI Labs team at IP Integration has built "ME", a set of 14 different pre-built voice and media-enabled applications, designed to help organisations improve productivity, extend self-service and empower their workforce. ME utilises a combination of CTI, IVR, Speech Recognition and SMS to deliver standard applications, ranging from Pay ME, which takes secure credit card payments from customers, to Connect ME, which enables callers to be automatically routed to the correct person or department. Each application can be deployed individually to address a specific issue, or applications can be combined to address even the most complex of requirements.

Enhancing Customer Access - Pay ME

Like all local authorities Gravesham Borough Council handles thousands of payments each week from their local residents. These include council tax, parking fines, business rates etc. and like any other organisation the Council constantly tries to find ways of reducing their ongoing transactional costs.

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At the same time the Council is required to comply with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS), a worldwide information security standard to help organisations that process card payments prevent credit card fraud through increased controls around data and its exposure to compromise. The standard applies to all organisations that hold, process or pass cardholder information.

“As we examined new ways for residents to pay monies due to the Council it became apparent that IP Integration had the perfect product for us in their Pay ME automatic telephone credit card payment solution.”

We also wanted to free up call centre agent time spent in processing credit cards and get them doing what they do best – human interaction with our residents and at the same time any new system introduced had to be really easy to use.

Installing the CTI Labs Pay ME application was very straightforward and brought with it the added benefit of more flexible payment ‘opening times’. Whereas before we could take payments only when the call centre was open, typically 9AM to 5PM, Monday to Friday, we now have a service that provides 24x7 opening times which suits many people far better. People now make payments at any time that suits them - in fact we have even processed payments on Christmas Day.

The number of payments made via self help has improved significantly thanks to Pay ME but we still ensure that callers have the choice of either the automated service or speaking to someone during normal office hours. Pay ME has achieved a high degree of acceptance with the citizens of Gravesham.”

When we looked originally at the Pay ME credit card system there were other products on the market but the CTI Labs products was slick, streamlined, easy to use and did not require huge investment in hardware. We could have gone for a competitor’s product but that would have been limited to a single application solution. With CTI Labs we can easily extend our capabilities.”

Enhancing Customer Access - Connect ME

Gravesham Borough Council is now looking to other applications in the CTI Labs application suite and has recently installed their Connect ME product.

Darren Everden, *“Connect ME is a great application that reliably and accurately answers and routes calls; callers simply say the name of the person, department or service they require and Connect ME will transfer their call.* The application uses a standard, centrally-held telephone directory which can be synchronised with Microsoft Active Directory as the source of data, which is stored in a SQL Server database and has a web based front end for administration.

What this means in actuality for the Council is that staff who would be otherwise occupied answering and handing off calls to the right department or person will now be freed up to undertake other duties. At the same time it will handle peaks and troughs in call volumes so that calls are handled more quickly when the switchboard is busy. It’s a real productivity-enhancing product.

Because the Pay ME application is already installed it also means that the infrastructure and building blocks, which are common, are already in place. Deployment was therefore cost effective, simple and fast.”

About IP Integration

Our goal is very simple: to help our clients derive the maximum benefit from technology through flexible tailored solutions, and we measure our success on your return on investment with us and on your continued loyalty, won through the excellence of service we guarantee to every one of our clients.

We know that developing the most successful communications infrastructure and managing new telephony, data and application services is a significant challenge facing businesses today. At IP Integration we understand that organisations must evolve their communications strategy, and through proven knowledge, experience and support, we provide complete business communications solutions.

Our voice, data, and systems integration solutions embrace the technology of the converged multi-service network for businesses of all sizes and the partnerships we have developed with the industry’s leading players coupled with our in-house bespoke software solutions allow us to offer unparalleled levels of application integration to our customers.

