your coop | Business Solutions

Business solutions remaining agile, efficient and connected

Rarely, if ever, have we seen such dramatic changes to so many peoples' working styles than over the last 18 months. As we move forward, working from home, or from other non-office locations, has become the preferred option for many employers.

Dan Birtles

? **What do you do?**
Head of Digital and IT, Co-operatives UK

⚇ **Who are your audience?**
Internal staff, and a variety of external audiences including members, non-members, partners, suppliers, tenants and other stakeholders.

As we settle and adapt into these new styles, an ultra-reliable, fit-for-purpose and ethical business communications infrastructure is required to ensure you stay connected to your communities.

To remain agile, efficient and connected to colleagues and members, while maintaining our organisation's core values, we have partnered with industry leaders to adopt scalable and sustainable Unified Communications (UC) solutions.

Your Co-op Business Solutions recently provided this type of unified communications system to Co-operatives UK, the trade body for co-operative enterprise. Their Head of Digital and IT, Dan Birtles talks about how they implemented this to respond to the change in how their organisation works.

Challenges

What challenges did you face when you moved to hybrid working?

Our on-premise telephone system was no longer fit for purpose – we had a legacy based communication platform with desk-based phones, which was obviously out of reach for our colleagues working remotely and we needed seamless connectivity. In addition, the system itself was complicated and required significant technical knowledge to fix issues or make small administrative changes. It was simply no longer worth the investment.

How did these challenges affect team morale, output, and how your members got in touch with you?

At the beginning of the pandemic, every staff member forwarded their office line to their personal mobile so they could carry on receiving calls from our members. Obviously, this wasn't ideal as it affected work–life balance, as staff members could receive work calls outside of their working hours. It also meant that they had to use their own mobiles to make outbound calls, either using their personal data plans and call minutes or having to submit expense claims using itemised bills.

What challenges necessitated a change?

We needed to digitise our communications, making it easy for our staff to stay connected and reachable no matter where they are. It was essential for them to be able to easily interact with members and each other using voice, chat and email channels using their business numbers from any device using desktop or mobile apps.

What were you looking for in a solution?

Our priorities were quickly apparent: to deliver a new scalable, resilient, flexible infrastructure to support our organisation and the people we communicate with. This required a predictable cost model as we adapted to new ways of working while continuing to grow.

https://broadband.yourcoop.coop/business-solutions

Broadband | Mobile | Cloud

The solution

Have you felt supported during and after UC was implemented?

Absolutely – the support was second to none. The level of engagement in planning, deployment and support was fantastic.

Has there been anything that has positively surprised you?

One of the main positives is that we've built such a strong consulting partnership. We were working together as a team – nothing was too much trouble and I felt reassured knowing that everything was in hand while I focused on other priorities.
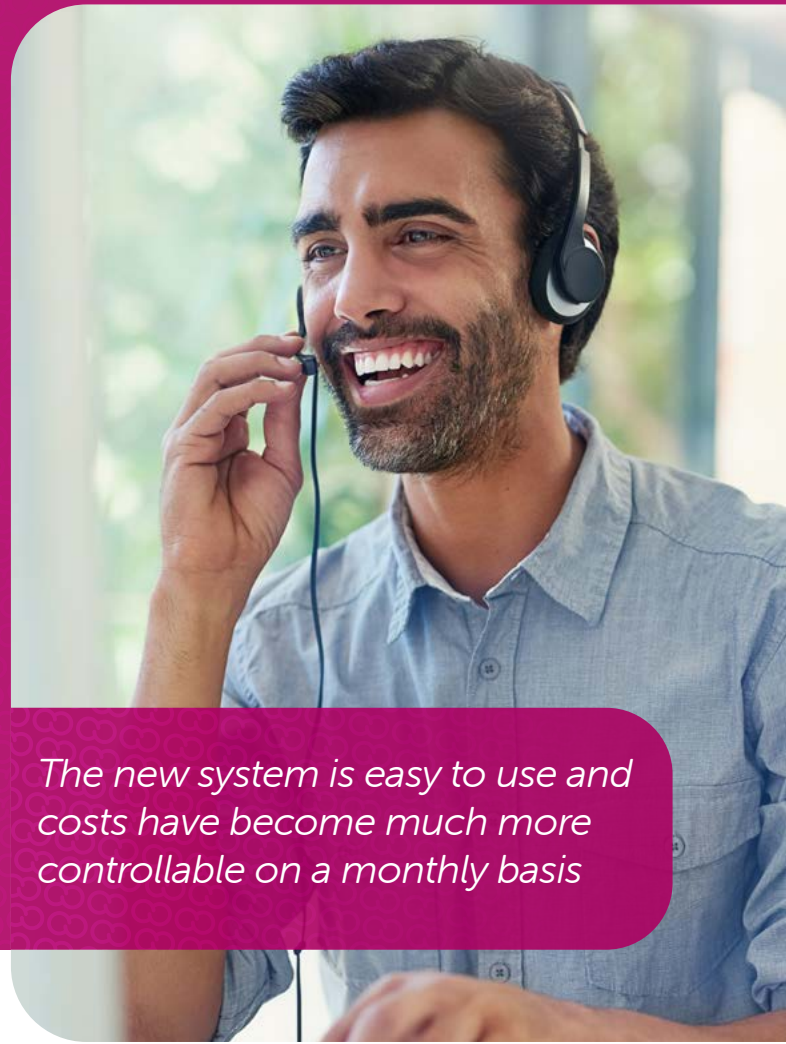
The new system is easy to use and costs have become much more controllable on a monthly basis

Sustainability

Has UC saved money or increased productivity?

Both – we've seen productivity increase as staff can communicate quickly and easily, and costs have become much more controllable on a monthly basis.

How has UC made your company more sustainable/helped reach sustainability goals?

Unified communications has meant that remote workers can communicate professionally without having to travel into the office or to meetings, reducing our carbon emissions.

Was sustainability a big factor in choosing your supplier?

Yes, moving to unified communications has not only reduced our energy needs, it's also helped reduce both employee and business travel.

What made the UC solution stand out from others you had considered?

The main appeal was its flexibility, allowing excellent integration and management of different devices, whether landline phone, laptop or mobile phone. It suited our needs perfectly, allowing multiple interconnected locations and homeworking.

How has UC helped since it was implemented?

It's helped in many ways. Most notably, it's boosted staff morale – having a system with features that allow calls to be diverted to other numbers or voicemail outside of working hours goes a long way to helping achieve work–life balance. And making and receiving calls has never been easier, with the choice of how you want to take the call – on a mobile, laptop or landline etc. Furthermore, we've been able to free up internal resources by having to do less of the mundane day-to-day administration and system support, so we're now able to work on projects to deliver new solutions.

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