

Making the switch for the customer

IS THIS YOU?

Telephone bookings are the lifeblood of a hotel business. So when one of the UK's leading hotel chains, which has more than 200 hotels and 400 restaurants, realised that its call centre was creaking at the seams, it was time to take drastic action.

More than three-quarters of the hotel chain's annual income comes from telephone bookings. The existing call centre was already working at full stretch, but the number of bookings was continuing to grow, and the company had ambitious expansion plans in the UK and Ireland. Additionally, customer relationship management (CRM) functions were limited, and a company reorganisation meant the call centre was being shared by several different hotel brands, which led to inefficiencies.

At the same time, the company had another problem: nearly one in 10 of its UK reservations were being received via its website. But this was hosted in the USA, giving the company insufficient control over the site's content, and perpetual fears that the link would go down and the site would be cut off.

The challenge

So the company needed three things: a new contact centre using similar technology to the old one but with scope for adding CRM applications; improved control over its website; and cast-iron IT and communications links with effective backups in case anything went wrong.

Although the company needed a system that was cast-iron, it did not want it to be set in concrete. A combination of the company's expansion plans and organic growth in the market meant that it expected to increase capacity over time, and flexibility was required to adapt to the company's needs as they changed.

The system was so critical that the hotel chain wanted a complete solution from a single supplier which was able to offer the requisite knowledge, experience, support and capability, including backup site, web hosting and voice recording. As a final constraint, the installation could take no more than a month, and during that time customers must remain blissfully unaware of all the work taking place behind the scenes.

How BT helped

BT fitted the bill perfectly. It was able to run the whole project, from call handling and web hosting to providing disaster recovery facilities. And it had previous experience of working with the hotel chain, so it understood the

business imperatives from the inside, and was familiar with the existing call centre and the technology it used.

The new call centre was designed and installed by BT, has 200 seats, employs 275 people, and is open 15 hours a day, seven days a week. Currently it answers about 80,000 calls a week, although it could handle almost double that number as business expands. Comprehensive reports give the hotel company's managers detailed feedback on the state of their business.

Despite the size and complexity of the new system, BT completed installation in only four weeks, and the call centre moved from the old building to the new one without a minute's downtime, so there was minimal impact on the company's ongoing operations. The telephone system worked without a hitch, and all the extra functions dovetailed seamlessly.

The result

Thanks to the new call centre, the hotel chain's guests can now make and confirm a reservation by phone in just 140 seconds.

But despite the precision and efficiency, care has been taken to make them feel they are still receiving a personal service. Each hotel has its own telephone number so guests can feel that they are booking directly with the hotel, and the call centre system can automatically provide verbal directions or fax a map.

Voice recording allows the company to

monitor call quality and provides a record of bookings. Recordings can also be used in staff training, and there has been an improvement in staff retention thanks to the improved working environment in the new call centre.

To allow for expansion in the business, the call centre building has been designed to handle 150,000 calls a week if necessary – almost double its current level, and enough to cope with 10 years of projected growth. The system will also allow the company to add voice recognition facilities, enabling it to take more calls without increasing staff numbers.

How it works

The hotel chain was keen to buy a hybrid package combining both back-office and call handling functions. Among the equipment and services provided by BT are: a Nortel Meridian contact centre switch; local and wide-area networking connectivity; an inbound 0870 service so each hotel can have its own number; a directions server; voice recording for call monitoring; an ISDN backup line from a second exchange; project management; and web hosting for online booking at BT's Cardiff site. Disaster recovery and business continuity are guaranteed via a backup site run by BT CommSure and third-party specialist ICM.

For more information please visit www.bt.com/business/crm or contact BT on 0800 287 287



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