

The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants

Delivering first-rate customer support to ACCA's global members



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Mark Devine, IT Director of ACCA

As the world's largest and fastest-growing international accountancy body, the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) has

over 345,000 members and students in 160 countries. Its reputation is grounded in over 100 years of providing internationally-recognised qualifications for accountants, finance professionals and staff with financial responsibility - at all stages of their careers. ACCA's aim is to further develop the global accountancy profession and to advocate the highest ethical and governance standards worldwide.

Name:

The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)

Industry sector:

Finance

Location:

Glasgow

Business challenge:

ACCA needed to acquire premises, consolidate telecoms suppliers, increase flexibility and contain costs - whilst improving connectivity and upgrading equipment - to deliver enhanced customer service.

Solution:

As ACCA's preferred supplier ntl delivered voice and data connectivity across four UK sites, and a fully managed service, in a three-year contract.

Products:

- ntl National Ethernet
- ntl Dedicated Internet Access
- ntl Ethernet VPN
- ntl ISDN 30
- ntl Analogue Lines
- LAN Infrastructure, IP Telephony & managed network support service
- Category 6 Structured Cabling

Business benefits:

ntl's complete telecoms solutions have delivered cost and time savings, increased operating efficiency and improved customer service for ACCA's members and students.

Ensuring first-rate industry standards

Reputable organisations want to work with reputable accountants, which means dealing only with those holding an officially recognised qualification and membership of a professional body. ACCA's unquestionable status as the premier body for its industry is driving unprecedented growth - in the UK alone, student numbers have increased by over 16,000 in just one year.

Professional accountancy bodies are also the driving force behind the adoption of an international ethical standards code - which not only governs financial reporting practices, but underpins the credibility and reputation of the industry as a whole. In its capacity as a global standards regulator ACCA has the additional responsibility for defining best business practice for its members, and helping them use this knowledge to benefit their employers, clients and stakeholders.

To handle training requests and regulatory queries ACCA provides its members and students with a global 24-hour customer service centre, based in Glasgow. For contact centre advisors to efficiently process these requests, a first-rate telecoms system is critical, and needs to enable ACCA to instantly access member or student caller details to help resolve enquiries as swiftly as possible - whilst allowing instant voice and data sharing between four UK sites and over 70 global centres.

Consolidating telecoms spend - and suppliers

At its UK sites, ACCA had a combination of voice and data services provided by three telecoms suppliers - one of which was ntl. Although this system had worked well for over 12 years, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the company to control and contain costs with three disparate providers. The organisation also needed to update its communications technology to provide converged data



and voice services - something which its existing analogue equipment could not deliver.

In line with a relocation project to move its contact service centre to a new site in Glasgow, ACCA decided to consolidate its existing telecoms services to a single supplier - who would also be responsible for upgrading the firm's long-standing telephony equipment across all premises.

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Mark Devine, IT Director of ACCA, explained, “A technology refresh is something every organisation has to perform if they are to remain competitive, efficient and effective. We wanted to combine a premises move and cyclical upgrade with adding value to the organisation and reducing operational overheads. We knew we needed a more advanced level of internal technology to meet the needs of our growing customer base - such as enhancing the visibility of calls to better manage requests, and adding bandwidth to increase the volume and transmission speed of data between sites. We also wanted a telecoms

system that was easy to support from one location - not across several sites - and that offered better network efficiency.”

Unparalleled technology at unrivalled cost

Following a competitive tendering process between ACCA's three existing telecoms suppliers, ntl's business division was awarded the three-year contract, worth £1.85 million, to provide enhanced voice and data connectivity and managed network support. ntl were able to offer reliability, network expertise and cost competitiveness, with a solution that fitted ACCA's technological needs, whilst simultaneously enabling the accounting body to achieve both short and long term cost savings through volume purchase.

Mark Devine said, “All the tenders were roughly equal on solution design, quality of service and capability - what ntl offered was a significantly better cost option with a wholly equivalent level of sophisticated technology. That meant we didn't have to lower our standards to benefit from a lower price, and we should additionally see very significant cost-savings over the course of the project. We didn't originally approach this as a cost-saving exercise, but with ntl's solution we got the best of both worlds.”

Delivering a complete communications package

In just three months, ntl has designed and delivered a complete range of bespoke telephony products and services to fulfil ACCA's wide-ranging requirements. Under the new single supplier contract ntl now provides a National Ethernet service; Dedicated and Flexible Internet Access; Ethernet Virtual Private Network (VPN); a Wide Area Network (WAN); ISDN30 for dedicated ISDN connectivity, and a fully managed network support service.



Additionally, in its capacity as a Cisco Systems Gold Partner, ntl has also supplied ACCA with its Local Area Network (LAN) Solution. This encompasses a Cisco-based infrastructure that includes security; content delivery; network management; Internet Protocol (IP) telephony; contact centre telephony; voice recording; voicemail; fax and wireless access points – all installed and managed by ntl's experienced engineers.

“As with any significant project of scale, the more effort you put into the design the more likely its execution will run smoothly. ntl were vigilant in proposing and designing a process that would satisfy our requirements, and ensured it ran on time and to budget. They also provided an excellent series of qualified engineers who were able to understand our requirements and our transactional volumes, and who continue to provide

dedicated, managed support for the entire system,” said Mark Devine.

“The National Ethernet solution uses the very latest technology to ensure traffic cannot be compromised in any way.”

Mark Devine, IT Director of ACCA

Enhancing security, improving data manageability

ACCA has also been one of three beta trialists of ntl's National Ethernet service – a low cost, high performance replacement for traditional leased lines that enables LANs to operate as a single Ethernet domain. ntl's Ethernet service enables ACCA to better handle its data storage on separate streams from corporate traffic, and so also

ensures the security of data storage as well as efficient backup. For ACCA, who holds personal information on all its members and students, this provides an additional layer of security and improved data manageability by allowing overnight database and server consolidation. In this way, in the event of a major application or server downtime, customer data is not lost and retains its integrity.

Mark Devine added, “Our customers pay for membership and subscriptions through our service centre, which requires us to hold personal and financial data on all 320,000 members and students so that we can process their requests efficiently. Therefore security is absolutely paramount, and ntl takes it as seriously as we do. The National Ethernet solution uses the very latest technology to ensure that private data is segregated from any other traffic so that it cannot be compromised in any way whatsoever.”

Enabling ACCA to deliver first-rate customer service

As well as providing an Ethernet connection, ntl's Dedicated Internet Access (DIA) and Flexible DIA service delivers variable bandwidth capabilities to ACCA. The accounting body publishes exam results online for its students twice a year, in February and August, and at these critical times needs to boost the transmission capability of this communications channel to meet demand. In the past ACCA used a standard quota of 2MB Internet access for ten months of the year, and flexed this up to 8MB in the busiest months. Under the new single supplier contract with ntl, the organisation now has the increased capacity of 4MB DIA and 15 MB Flexible DIA, which will enable ACCA to provide a much enhanced service to its growing users.

Furthermore, ntl's lower cost, higher performance solution enables voice and data traffic to be shared between

ACCA's sites across the UK. Benefiting from a cost-effective one-off rental charge ACCA is now able to send information back and forth at no extra cost, whilst improving communications between staff.

Through ntl's ISDN30, ACCA is also now benefiting from clearer and instant voice connectivity between its on-site equipment at the contact centre in Glasgow and the core ntl network. The solution delivers a cost-effective tariff whilst ensuring that incoming calls are instantly directed to the right person to improve service to members and students. ntl ISDN30 will also offer ACCA the opportunity to extend voice integration to its global offices, and perform audio and video conferencing on a national and international basis.

This complex network infrastructure is further supported by a fully managed service throughout the three year framework agreement with ACCA. The business division now provides a single point of contact and engineer support to manage connectivity and instantly resolve any service issues should they arise.

A successful, long-term partnership

The consolidated solution from ntl has enabled ACCA to pool the operational efficiencies of its new system to greatly enhance the service it provides to members and students – generating better value for money and increased customer satisfaction as a result. ntl has also enabled ACCA to generate immediate cost-savings – and reduce its telecoms spend - whilst significantly

enhancing efficiency and effectiveness across the entire organisation.

Mark Devine concluded, "As a partner, ntl has been excellent. They have totally met and exceeded our expectations – when they say a product will be delivered on Tuesday and it will be working the following Thursday, they mean it. Their control over all elements of this project is admirable; from the first engineer to come on-site to the last system upgrade trainer, this entire project has taken just three months. ntl has been absolutely exemplary in delivering these services, and their project management skills have been excellent. We continue to be impressed with ntl, and look forward to working with them on this three-year contract."

To find out more:

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