



Housing association responds faster to residents thanks to Unified Communications solution

- Backup, recovery and archiving
- Data consolidation and management
- Green efficiency
- Mobility
- Unified communications
- Virtualization



“Thanks to our unified communications solution from Dell, our agents can direct a customer call to the appropriate person in less than a minute.”

*Neil Jones,
Head of Information Systems,
Newport City Homes*

Customer profile

Company:	Newport City Homes (NCH)
Industry:	Not-for-profit
Country:	United Kingdom
Founded:	2009
Employees:	352
Website:	www.newportcityhomes.com

Business need

Newport City Homes (NCH) wanted to serve residents more effectively. It needed to build an efficient datacentre and end-user infrastructure, as well as a communications solution.

Solution

Helped by Dell consultants, NCH implemented a Microsoft® Unified Communications solution, Windows® 7 and a partially virtualized Dell datacentre, with Latitude™ laptops and OptiPlex™ desktops for staff.



Benefits

- Residents have their queries answered faster
- Around 50 per cent saved on set-up costs with unified communications
- Implementation is completed four months ahead of schedule
- Organisation maximises value for money with efficient datacentre
- Staff are more productive thanks to mobile computing and Windows 7

Providing excellent service to residents is a top priority for Newport City Homes (NCH). With over 9,000 homes under management, its 352 staff work hard to deliver safe, high-quality homes for the people of Newport.

“Luckily, before committing to PBX, we spoke to our Dell account team, which told us that Microsoft Unified Communications would bring voice and data together to help employees work in more efficient ways.”

*Darren Lloyd,
Information Systems Manager,
Newport City Homes*

When the tenants of Newport voted to transfer the city’s housing stock to a newly created Registered Social Landlord, Neil Jones, Head of Information Systems at NCH, saw a chance to improve the way residents were served. The newly created organisation – starting operations from a new building – needed a complete datacentre and an end-user infrastructure, including a communications solution. Jones explains: “Because everything had to be built from scratch, there was real scope to use IT to respond more efficiently to the needs of residents. For example, by reducing the often lengthy times residents with housing queries were kept waiting on the phone.”

Around 50 per cent saved on set-up costs with Unified Communications

NCH was close to choosing a traditional private branch exchange (PBX) telephony solution when it began talking to Dell – one of two infrastructure providers it had shortlisted. Darren Lloyd, Information Systems Manager, NCH, says: “Luckily, before committing to PBX, we spoke to our Dell account team, which told us that Microsoft Unified Communications would bring voice and data together to help employees work in more efficient ways. It would not only provide a full Unified Communications suite, but also be easier to manage and 50 per cent cheaper to set up.”

“We made up our minds after Dell came to show us how Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2 would work for us. Dell Consulting Services ran a test environment, after

which we were convinced that unified communications would help us work more efficiently than a traditional voice-only solution,” says Lloyd.

Technology at work

Services

Dell Consulting Services
– Workshop, Assessment, Design & Implementation (WADI)

Dell ProSupport for IT
– Mission Critical option

Hardware

Dell™ PowerEdge™ R610 servers with Intel® Xeon® Processors 5540

Dell EqualLogic PS5000E and PS5000X iSCSI storage area network (SAN)

Dell PowerVault™ MD1000 direct attached storage array

Dell PowerVault TL2000 tape library

Dell Latitude™ E5500 and E6500 laptops with Intel Core™ Processors

Dell OptiPlex™ 760 desktops with Intel Core Processors

Software

Microsoft® Dynamics® CRM

Microsoft Exchange Server 2010

Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2

Microsoft SharePoint® Server 2010

VMware® ESX 3.5 server software

Windows® 7



50 per cent saved on set-up costs with Unified Communications

As a result of the successful demonstration, and following an initial tender, NCH appointed Dell as its sole provider. Jones says: "We realised that Dell could deliver the entire solution. This would make our lives simpler, because we'd have a single point of contact. Also, it was obvious that Dell's Unified Communications experts really knew what they were talking about, so we felt confident the project would be a success." Dell designed a solution using Microsoft Unified Communications as the only telephony solution for NCH, avoiding the additional cost of a traditional PBX and giving complete flexibility.

Added-value solution found through collaborative approach

Fast completion was a priority because NCH was keen to improve services to residents as soon as possible. Also – to maximise energy-efficiency and value for money – the IT team wanted to virtualize as much of the infrastructure as it could. It worked with Dell's consultants to assess NCH's needs and design the solution. Lloyd explains: "Our workshops with Dell added real value to our virtualization project. For example, we were introduced to Dell EqualLogic storage, giving us the modular building blocks we required to expand our storage capacity easily in future."

"We don't need downtime to expand EqualLogic's capacity, so we can maintain business as usual while carrying out this work. In fact a recent upgrade to our SAN took us no more than 20 minutes to complete, with the majority of this time spent installing the hardware into our rack," says Lloyd.

NCH also learnt that it would be better off implementing the Windows® 7 operating system from the outset, rather than upgrading later. As a result, staff have a higher performing system that is easier to use with features such as enhanced security and improved file management, which makes the solution more efficient than NCH had originally anticipated.

NCH chose a datacentre comprising:

- 10 Dell™ PowerEdge™ servers running VMware® ESX server software, for its core housing management and back-office applications.
- Two Dell EqualLogic PS5000E and PS5000X storage area networks (SANs) in a mirrored configuration for efficient, scalable storage.
- A Dell PowerVault™ MD1000 direct attached storage array and PowerVault TL2000 tape library for reliable, easy-to-expand backup to disk and tape.
- Seven non-virtualized PowerEdge servers, including R610 servers with Intel® Xeon® Processors 5540 for its Microsoft® Unified Communications solution, including Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2 and Microsoft Exchange Server 2010.

Residents benefit sooner thanks to fast implementation

Working with a Dell project manager and Dell technicians, Jones and his team implemented the solution in just three months. This was quicker than expected, so the new environment went live ahead of plan. Jones explains: "As one of the largest Registered Social Landlords in Wales, it was important for us to show that we could deliver real improvements for residents. Because

implementation of our infrastructure and the unified communications solution was completed four months ahead of schedule, we were able to deliver improvements ahead of time."

Organisation maximises value for money with efficient datacentre

As a publicly funded organisation, NCH must deliver value for money. It has achieved this by virtualizing a large part of its datacentre. This means it can run multiple virtual servers on each of its virtualized Dell PowerEdge servers. And it benefits from automated management tools, which save time for the IT team. "Thanks to virtualization, we have fewer machines to look after, and – because many tasks are automated – our Dell PowerEdge servers, EqualLogic storage and PowerVault backup solution are incredibly easy to manage, so we need just four IT support staff," says Jones.

NCH has maximised the energy-efficiency of its datacentre, because virtualization reduces the number of physical servers it needs to power. The organisation also worked closely with Dell and its partner APC in adopting a cutting-edge approach to the design of its datacentre. NCH wanted a fully modular and environmentally friendly design, based on the APC infrastructure building-block approach, which fully integrates power, cooling and environmental management. "This element of the project was a joint effort between us, Dell and APC, with Dell project managing our input so that deliverables, responsibilities and timelines were clear and manageable," says Jones.

The system is based both on the power and cooling requirements of each server and storage device and on estimates of future requirements as the datacentre grows. "Our innovative datacentre design helps keep our costs low, because we cool each rack individually as opposed to cooling the entire room. It means we need less power to maintain a constant operating temperature, while we can monitor power, cooling, and environmental conditions in real time," says Lloyd.

This has helped the organisation achieve a BRE Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) low environmental impact rating for its new building, in line with Newport City Homes green policy.

Residents have their queries answered faster

When residents need help with repairs or housing advice, NCH must respond quickly. In the past, residents were often kept waiting on the phone, because contact centre agents struggled to reach the right staff. Now, using Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2 running on NCH's Dell server platform, agents can engage experts within the organisation immediately, which helps them improve first call resolution rates for residents. Microsoft Office Communications Server shows the members of staff who are available and how best to reach them, for example by instant messaging, mobile phone or landline. Says Jones: "Before, residents typically waited five minutes on the line, often just to be told that someone would call them back. Now, thanks to

our unified communications solution, callers can be talking to the right person in less than a minute."

Collaboration is increased for the benefit of residents

Today, thanks to NCH's unified communications environment from Dell, the organisation's staff are more productive, which benefits residents. NCH also cuts overheads, because staff make fewer calls to fixed and mobile phones. With tools such as voice over IP, instant messaging and voicemail with unified messaging – part of Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2 and Exchange Server 2010 – staff can collaborate easily and cost efficiently from any location. Says Lloyd: "Instant messaging in particular means our employees are more productive, because they can get answers immediately as opposed to waiting for colleagues to respond to emails or voice messages."

Office Communications Server also integrates with other Microsoft applications, such as Microsoft SharePoint® Server 2010 and Microsoft Dynamics® CRM, which NCH has implemented using its flexible and scalable Dell EqualLogic storage solution for easy server deployment. This means that agents don't have to leave CRM in order to contact experts within the organisation whenever a resident needs help.

Staff are more productive thanks to mobile computing

To boost productivity and help staff gain a better work-life balance, NCH wants to expand home working.

As part of a complete computer refresh, it bought:

- 150 Dell OptiPlex™ 760 desktops with Intel Core™ Processors for its offices
- 200 Dell Latitude™ E5500 and E6500 laptops with Intel Core™ Processors to encourage mobile working, facilitated by NCH's unified communications tools, including voice over IP

"With the Dell Latitude E family and Windows 7, staff have the robust and versatile laptops they need to make the most of our unified communications solution, and work as efficiently from home as they do in the office. This helps staff improve their work/life balance, and is fundamental to our business continuity plan. This was demonstrated recently when many of our employees were snowed in at home, but carried on working on their laptops, which meant residents saw no disruption to service," says Jones.

Service continuity is protected with Dell ProSupport for IT

Housing services are vital to the people of Newport, so NCH's system must run 24/7. For this reason, the IT team chose to protect the solution with Dell ProSupport for IT, Mission Critical option with four-hour on-site response. Says Jones: "We haven't had any downtime so far, but it's reassuring to know we can rely on Dell ProSupport for IT to make sure it stays that way."

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