Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

Fire Service Improves End User Experience & Lower Costs with Skype for Business Enterprise Voice
the customer
overview

Customer
Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service

Website
http://www.notts-fire.gov.uk/

Number of employees
Approx 1,100

Country or region
Nottinghamshire, United Kingdom

Industry
Fire and Rescue

Customer profile
Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service works to keep residents, visitors and businesses safe from fire and other dangers. They do this through various activities, which include:

• providing a front-line emergency response service (i.e. 999) from 24 fire stations, strategically placed across the county.
• advising business owners on fire safety and taking enforcement action where legislation is breached
• supporting vulnerable people who need help with safety at home
• teaching people, particularly those under the age of 18 how to reduce the risks to themselves and their families and friends.
“People are getting to grips with instant messaging and presence and the rewards are being reaped already, we will save thousands and thousands of pounds in call costs. We will get more productivity from our workforce and the solution allows us to work a lot slicker.

The G-Cloud framework made the procurement process very quick and easy, and ensured we were getting good value”

Gavin Harris, Head of ICT, NFRS
NFRS had an old PABX system in place at their HQ using out of date technology; in addition to this the 24 individual station sites were all using their own PABX systems with individual ISDN lines. This resulted in a very complex telephony environment with high running costs as every call made was an external one. BT no longer had staff that could fix the legacy equipment and NFRS had no internal skills to maintain it which created a significant risk to the business. It was also creating an administrative overhead as support had to be spread across every site. It was clear to NFRS that it needed to simplify and update their voice infrastructure system.
A new MPLS network gave NFRS the opportunity to take advantage of new communications technology and remove costly legacy telephone systems. A unified communications solution using Microsoft Skype for Business enabled NFRS to achieve the following key priorities:

- Ensure external and internal calls work seamlessly for home and mobile users
- Enable the IT team to manage the new platform
- Visibility of user availability via published presence information
- Excellent connectivity for multi device and channel communications, including text-based chat, video and audio calls
- Integration with old technology at fire stations to ensure easy transition for firefighters and staff
- Provide a mechanism for distributing calls from publicly facing numbers to relevant departments and groups, using a balancing mechanism.
- Consolidate existing Public Switched Telephone Network connections to the central service, reducing the cost of maintenance and ongoing line rental costs
- Provide an interface for non-smartphone users to access their Mailbox and Calendar and have items read back to them.
designing the solution

Every organisation is unique and no solution should be the same. A key aspect of the risual engagement process was to meet with every department and design a bespoke solution that would take every users needs into account. This level of care and attention to detail ensures NFRS gets the most from its investment and the solution.

The solution design process was carried out by one of risual’s Unified Communications experts, which means every member of staff spoke to someone with technical knowledge to ensure their needs are included in the designs. risual’s approach was described by Gavin Harris as “a revelation for us, the way they work and their knowledge meant they were designing the solution to deal with problems before they could even become a problem”.

strategic alignment

risual deployed an enterprise architect along with an engagement manager to ensure the project remains aligned to the business needs. risual’s enterprise architect worked with the NFRS IT team to integrate an existing staff centralisation project into the solution. This move ensured NFRS received maximum value from the project, and the solution was aligned with the long term organisation objectives.

Early engagement with the business through Buzz Days and continuous communication with the department heads throughout the project ensured that the new telephony system was well received by staff. “Setting the scene and walking people through the new telephony and communications system in advance of rolling it out, enabled everyone to see what was coming. People are getting to grips with instant messaging and presence and the rewards are being reaped already” - Gavin Harris
Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service had unique requirements to integrate necessary legacy hardware with the Skype for Business solution and risual were able to solve this issue through a combination of business understanding and technical ability.

Some of the outstanding work achieved by risual experts included:

- **Integration of Skype for Business with fire station PA system** – staff at HQ can now “call” an entire station to broadcast over the speakers to ensure emergency messages are heard by everyone.

- **Increased gate security** – centralised admin staff can now operate every remote site’s gate system and speak to visitors to verify identity which reduces overheads.

- **Call re-routing** – in peak times calls can be re-routed to allow staff to answer phones for other departments, such as when many calls are coming to the press office, admin staff can answer on their behalf.

- **Wireless assessment** – even rural stations have to cope with high levels of emergency calls and so wireless assessments were carried out to provide performance benchmarking to ensure consistent quality.

- **Deployment testing** – risual tested the solution to ensure that the platform will cope with even the most demanding requirements.

- **Virtual localisation** – when a citizen calls a local fire station using its localised dial number, if no one is available to answer HQ will pick up the call and will be able to identify which station is being dialled. This ensures quicker call pick up times without any impact on citizens.
benefits

The partnership between risual and Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has already seen immediate results from this project. Gavin stated, “You’re already seeing people making an effort to use it, you can see people getting to grips with presence. People can be walking a quarter of a mile plus to speak to someone only to find they’re not there. Presence will really help to see where people are available and make the best use of their time”.

In addition to this, the organisation will see a huge reduction in costs thanks to the deployment of a network wide voice over IP system, which will “save thousands and thousands of pounds in call costs.”

The organisation has already seen an increase in staff productivity and flexibility in terms of management, as staff can now answer each other’s calls, and are no longer reliant on a site administrator at every location being available 24/7 to respond to calls. “We can centralise the workforce and work a lot slicker” Gavin said.
Due to risual’s customer engagement process, they built a custom solution designed to give maximum value to the customer. risual worked hard to comprehensively understand the challenges the organisation faced. They also understood that the project required a solution that was cost effective and would work in line with the user expectations. The approach they took was to ensure the environment was delivered to “best practice” standard.

Karen Dallyn of risual says, “We are very proud of the work we accomplished, and it is great to know it will benefit the whole community in the long term. Our partnership with Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service has helped us meet the organisation needs for improving communication which has lowered costs and in turn enabled a more efficient way of serving citizens.”