City and Guilds achieve increased productivity and flexible communications globally

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Ian Turfrey, Director of IT, City & Guilds

City & Guilds, a global leader in skills education, is transforming communication and collaboration for its 1000 employees worldwide. In order to achieve this, it makes full use of the interoperability and flexibility of Microsoft technologies, federated with Office 365. At the same time, back-office functions are streamlined and brought up to date, again with Microsoft products playing a prominent role.
Business Needs

City & Guilds has grown substantially since it was founded in 1878 by the City of London and 16 of the City’s historic livery companies. Backed by a Royal Charter, it awards approximately two million certificates every year, provides globally-recognised qualifications and learning support services, and works with employers and training providers across the world.

City & Guilds has always recognised that the ability to compete in a global economy depends on a skilled and confident workforce. Over time, it has also learned the importance of being agile and responsive to change. It has done this by developing new products and services to help equip learners with the skills they need to succeed in the workplace.

Unsurprisingly, the organisation does not intend to rest on its laurels. Vocational education, skills development and employer engagement are all moving up the agenda internationally. City & Guilds will remain at the forefront of these and other developments, continuing to broaden its support for learners, employers and training providers.

In order to move forward, however, City & Guilds needs to be sure that its IT infrastructure is efficient, resilient and future-proof. Nowhere is this more important than in the area of worldwide communication and collaboration. The organisation works in over 80 countries, with eight regional offices around the world. The geographical distance presents a challenge, as administrators from Hong Kong, South Africa and London all need to be fully involved in the life and work of the organisation. At the same time, it’s essential that the City & Guilds brand carries the same reputation for quality and trust wherever it is found.

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Ian Turfrey, Director of IT, City & Guilds
Solution

Speaking of the challenge, City & Guilds Director of IT Ian Turfrey says:

“We needed to create a modern agile environment that delivers flexible communication and increased productivity through sharing information globally.”

The IT team decided that the most effective way to achieve this was to create a digital space which allowed participants to collaborate and communicate at anytime, anywhere. They needed to be able to use any device and work using voice, video or shared documents. They also needed to have seamless access, with appropriate permissions, to whatever functions and resources are needed for their work. The technologies involved had to be reliable, easy-to-use and cost effective.

First step
In 2011, it was clear that the existing IT provision was inadequate for that strategic purpose. In a presentation on the City & Guilds IT journey, Ian Turfrey demonstrated the complexities and inefficiencies of the existing network. It contained thousands of applications with multiple licensing arrangements, separate internal and external phone systems, and a vast number of physical and virtual servers.

The installation of Wi-Fi, Windows 7, Office 2010 and Lync 2010 led to huge improvements. Then came the opportunity to leverage the investment by moving applications to the cloud - to a shared space where there would be easy access to a range of related resources. Office 365 adds the necessary dimension.

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Alun Rogers, risual
Benefits

The benefits of Office 365 were immediately apparent. Rapid communication and online meetings were instantly available with Lync 2013.

“I can now talk to my fellow board members via Lync,” says Ian. “Also I work from home and can still participate in meetings and work with key suppliers more easily. Lync 2013 works as an app and I've not had to ask people to download or use it – they have voluntarily put this on their phones. We have had a Lync conference, for example, using an android device, iPad, and PC desktop.” Ian went on to explain how email is improved with Office 365. “Staff enjoy the 1TB of extra storage. It not only saves them on-site storage capacity, it’s easier to support.”

The move from on-premise SharePoint to SharePoint 2013 in the cloud, working on any device, provides another unifying feature: a shared workspace that’s as readily available in Sri Lanka as it is in London. Add to this the fact that the Windows 8 phone is now the standard device for the organisation – managed by Windows ‘Intune’ which also looks after other mobile devices – and it’s clear that what Ian has put together is a cleverly integrated suite of Microsoft technologies federated within the cloud. Working together, they have enabled the organisation to save time and money, reduce frustration, remove feelings of isolation and help staff to feel more involved.

Lync – the user’s perspective.

Mike Dawe is the International Director at City & Guilds. International business is a significant sector for City & Guilds, operated through offices spread widely across the world, including Hong Kong, Malaysia, Ireland, Hungary, Sri Lanka, Dubai, South Africa and New Zealand. Mike, who has a strong track record of technological innovation in vocational training, has been quick to see the benefits of Lync and provides this summary of how it is transforming collaboration and communication in his area of responsibility.

“Our team is spread thinly around the world which can frustrate communication, collaboration and team building. But recently, we have made a concerted effort to make Lync a normal part of our lives - and it’s great! We use it for one-to-one conversations and for multi-location team meetings for updates and for collaboration on projects, which has brought all the expected benefits of seeing the people you are talking to and of sharing documents. We also find that we are able to work with colleagues effortlessly even when they are in countries where the mobile phone networks are unreliable. And, perhaps most unexpectedly, we are using Lync for informal team-to-team gatherings using big screens, allowing people who may never get to meet face-to-face to get to know each other. Lync is a powerful addition to our business; not just improving our communication tools, but also helping positive changes in our culture. I expect this to translate through to improved staff engagement and all the benefits that brings.”

Ian Turfrey, Director of IT, City & Guilds
Also quick to see the possibilities of Lync is Ken Gaines, a City & Guilds Portfolio Manager with responsibility over ICT, Finance, and Health & Safety. In that role he is in frequent contact with a large number of internal and external stakeholders, helping to develop the organisation’s wide range of courses and qualifications, and keeping them updated and fit for purpose. ‘Lync’ is proving a great help in this, and Ken describes how he first realised its potential.

It was great when I realised that I was able to see when a key contact is on or offline. The beauty is that when I want to get hold of someone on Lync, I don’t have to waste my time trying to phone them when they’re not there; I can instantly see where they are. It allows me to talk to a number of key contacts in a much more efficient way. A number of colleagues have started to use Lync to hold conversations rather than clogging up our email systems. All in all, Lync has started to transform the way I work.

As Lync develops, Ken envisages it will be used in what he calls ‘a webinar fashion’ to have extensive conversations with centres.

**Lync and distance learning.**

Alongside the benefits that Microsoft has helped City & Guilds to deliver internally, they have also worked together to enhance the experience of City & Guilds learners. For example, says Ken Gaines, ‘We’re also working with Microsoft to develop a remote learning and assessment programme. This enables our centres to deliver learning to apprentices at different locations.’

“You can see it at work through a collection of video clips on the City & Guilds website. They demonstrate just how excellent the collaboration between them and Microsoft really is. They show how Lync is used to remotely deliver both City & Guilds and Microsoft certifications to apprentices in their own workplaces.”

In one example, David King, Director of Microsoft Partner at ADM Computing explains that, thanks to Lync, an ADM apprentice can work seamlessly between training and work. “They support customers, go on to virtual training, finish that, go back to supporting customers and they haven’t even left their desk. It’s very streamlined and beneficial for us.”

ADM apprentice Bryn Machanley-Daley is very happy with the opportunity to gain both City & Guilds and Microsoft Certification. “The remote assessment is beneficial to me and to the assessor,” Bryn says. ‘We use Microsoft Lync and it allows the assessor to present his desktop to us. We can all talk to him and it has worked very well. It gives me a very good basis. I will be certified both by Microsoft and City & Guilds and that should give me a broad range of options.’
Benefits (cont...)

Back office
Parallel to the improved services for City & Guilds employees and apprentices worldwide is a radical overhaul of business IT services. All business applications have moved from Oracle to Microsoft SQL, and where appropriate, applications are being decoupled from the existing ERP system and managed instead by Microsoft Biztalk, which provides more flexibility. Use of the cloud, in the form of Microsoft ‘Azure’ also features strongly in this area. As Ian Turfrey explains, “We’ll be putting test and development in the cloud, and creating applications using Azure.”

Partner involvement
Fundamental changes as described here inevitably require the establishment of partnerships. In this case, there’s been three-way collaboration between the City & Guilds IT team, Microsoft, through FE Business Manager Mike Morris, and Microsoft partner ‘risual’, a major IT services organisation, which exclusively offers Microsoft solutions. Their expertise has been deployed at all stages of consultancy and technical implementation.

Commenting on their work with City & Guilds, risual’s Alun Rogers says: “We at risual are pleased to be involved with such a prestigious organisation in the education sector. Our role has been to underpin the City & Guilds transformation programme, at a strategy level plus at a tactical level as an extension of the City & Guilds own internal IT department. Because of risual’s wide capability across the Microsoft stack, together with expertise in positioning for the Cloud, risual has been able to offer City & Guilds a single partner engagement across all areas. This also achieves the high degree of integration which is an important element in a Microsoft strategy.”

Moving Forward
Ian Turfrey is particularly looking forward to developing the relationship with Microsoft and creating what he describes as a “close working relationship at strategic level.” “That’s exciting for us,” he says. “I can’t develop all of this myself, and by aligning with Microsoft we can realise our future ambitions more easily and cost effectively. It’s clear there are significant plans in the pipeline, to which we will be able to return as they develop.

For more information about this solution or the products and consulting services that risual can offer, contact us on the following or visit our website:

www.risual.com

Mike Dawe, International Director, City & Guilds