

## **OUT OF THE ASHES**

### **Project Overview**

In the early summer of 2008 a fire ripped through Melton Borough Council's head quarters, gutting the offices and rendering them unusable.

The IT project team was under pressure to deal with the immediate aftermath of the fire and return the business to normal.

After successfully restoring service, the team seized the opportunity created to introduce state of the art technology, allowing the Council to transform the way it operates and delivers service to its customers.

### **Return on Investment**

With skill and dedication the IT project team turned disaster into triumph. As a result of the teams' foresight and perseverance a new and better Council arose 'Out of the Ashes' of the devastating fire.

The leading-edge technologies implemented by the team have transformed the way in which the Council operates and conducts business with its customers. The culture of the organisation has changed and a more dynamic and flexible workforce has evolved.

The team ensured continued and unbroken service delivery to the Council's customers by swiftly bringing the disaster recovery centre in to use. The centre housed the Council's call centre and key staff members. The project team enabled staff that could not be housed at the centre to continue working by issuing them with tablets and providing access to the Council's servers by remote access.

The team worked collaboratively with the Council's partners to bring the new children's centres within Melton Mowbray rapidly on line. In conjunction with office space rented in Melton Mowbray the children's centres allowed the Council to promptly re-establish a presence within its home town.

With its contact centre destroyed by the fire the children's centres were swiftly refitted by the project team to provide alternative facilities. This enabled Customer Services to deliver a face to face service within the town. An added advantage of this was that services could be delivered within the neighbourhoods of the Council's most vulnerable and needy residents.

The children's centres are now operating as successful multi-agency service bases. This has made services more accessible to residents and allowed them to be delivered more efficiently.

Faced with the prospect of limited office space spread over the whole of Melton Mowbray, the team introduced technologies to support hot desking and flexible working. Working as a team with local IT solutions providers, new PC's and tablets were procured and installed to support the new environment. As a result office space utilisation now approaches 80%.

The reduction in office space now used by the Council will lead to reduced costs both now and in the future.

Faced with the challenge of having nowhere to store paper documents and the need to make the information contained within them available at multiple sites, the team introduced an electronic storage and retrieval system, which was accessible via the Internet. Paper records salvaged from the fire were scanned and made available to staff at any location.

The push towards a paper light organisation was further enhanced by the team's decision to implement multi functional devices to replace the numerous printers, photocopiers and scanners in use before the fire. Meetings are now largely conducted electronically by making use of the secure WiFi and tablets introduced by the team.

The team also introduced a new website and CRM system. These enhanced systems have enabled the Council to refine the service that is delivered to the public.

## **Innovation**

A key factor enabling the Council to successfully rise 'Out of the Ashes' and transform itself has been the implementation of leading-edge technology and the new ways of working.

The situation created by the fire presented the Council with a unique opportunity to redefine itself. The organisation suddenly became willing to accept massive changes and this presented the opportunity to implement a large number of new technologies simultaneously, which has had a dramatic effect on the way the Council works. The culture of the organisation has changed and a more dynamic and flexible workforce has evolved.

The project team selected and implemented a large number of leading-edge technologies to support the flexible working environment that was created.

Key to enabling service delivery was facilitating remote access to the Council's IT systems. The team quickly implemented a secure remote access via a secure socket layer virtual private network (SSL VPN). Staff working in disparate locations were able to access vital IT systems via a secure web browser session. This system now provides the facility to staff to work securely from home.

Faced with an impending move back to Melton Mowbray, the team had to source and procure a new communications network. The new system had to be able to adapt and evolve with the changes in internal structure and in physical location as the council gradually returned from its various temporary remote locations first, to interim offices and ultimately to new, purpose-built, permanent headquarters in the town.

Working to extremely tight deadlines and with a constantly changing scenario, the team implemented a robust interim networking solution to help restore the communications around essential services and the provision of communications with the public. A new call centre was setup to handle and route calls from the public and restore internal communications across the eight initial temporary sites and for those working from home.

The technology selected was a leading edge Voice Over IP system. This made implementation a lot easier as both voice and data traffic could be carried over the same network. The system provides advanced call centre features with skills based routing which has allowed the call centre to improve its effectiveness.

The call centre is integrated into a unified communications platform and incorporates advanced applications including Presence, which monitors who is available and routes calls more efficiently, Unified Messaging and Instant Messaging ensuring that individuals are contacted as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The team also took the opportunity to install a new CRM system, which coupled with the implementation of a service orientated architecture has enabled the Customer Services team to gain easy access to information held within back office systems.

The Internet proved to be an invaluable tool. Staff could easily be informed who needed to be where and when and what was happening. The public were kept informed about where they could obtain

services. This was made easier by replacing the old website with a new content management driven system.

## **Management**

The initial task of the IT project team was to recover the Council's services at the disaster recovery centre in Nottingham. The fire occurred on a Friday morning and all of the Council's services were available the following Monday morning. As a result of this the Council's customers experienced no disruption to service.

The initial recovery was managed by implementing the Council's IT disaster recovery plan. This was very successful. The events experienced by Melton Borough Council are a valuable lesson to all organisations of the need to plan and prepare for a disaster.

Following the initial recovery the team had to operate to very tight timescales. There was no tolerance on time as the Council's disaster recovery contract provided for only 90 days use of the disaster recovery centre. An initial move back to Melton Mowbray was completed within this restriction.

There was no set budget for the project. Funding was provided from the Council's insurance policy. Funding was made available on the approval of a business cases for each task that needed to be completed within the project. The team quickly became skilled at developing business cases to access the funding required.

Like many other highly successful projects the project team utilised the principals of PRINCE2 to manage the project.

A project board was formed and a programme manager recruited to run the project. The project board met on a weekly basis to review progress, receive highlight reports and deal with any exceptions and issues arising. Given the speed with which the project needed to be completed the project board had delegated authority to make all decisions necessary to ensure that the Council successfully rose 'Out of the Ashes'.

The resources required to complete the project were identified and put in place. External contractors and private sector companies were brought in to provide the additional manpower and skills required.

The project proved to be highly fluid in nature, with events and circumstances forcing the team to change the plan on many occasions. The team quickly learnt that the delivery of a Wide Area Network between the new workplace locations to be used was a major risk. A number of different options were developed for the project implementation, incorporating a variety of delivery schedules.

The team successfully managed the initial recovery from the fire, and triumphantly moved the Council back to Melton Mowbray and they procured and implemented many leading edge technologies to support the process.

The main project objective was to move the Council back to Melton Mowbray from the disaster recovery centre in Nottingham and return the organisation back to normal. The project team managed to run the project in such a way as to surpass these objectives, in that not only was the Council moved back to Melton Mowbray, but the technologies employed to achieve this have enabled the Council to transform itself.

## **Excellence**

The use of advanced technology has played a vital part in enabling the Council to recover from its disaster and in allowing it to optimise the way in which it works and delivers services.

The use of a secure SSL VPN remote access system was essential in the months immediately following the fire. For those staff that did not have accommodation in the disaster recovery centre, it enabled them to work from anywhere where they could find an internet connection. The VPN enabled staff to work from home, Internet cafes, motorway service stations and libraries. The Council had only 40 desks available, but the SSL VPN enabled all of the Council's 200 staff to continue working.

The SSL VPN now provides the facility to support staff working from home. Any member of staff with broadband at home can now undertake their work at times most convenient to themselves and the organisation.

The use of advanced tablet computers also proved essential. Tablets were issued to staff after the fire and enabled them to work from anywhere they could find suitable space, using either broadband or GPRS.

Tablets have significantly reduced the amount of paper needed within the organisation. The touch sensitive screens and hand writing recognition software on the tablets allows staff to make notes electronically and refer to those notes at a later date without the need to carry around and store large volumes of paper.

Following the successful completion of the 'Out of the Ashes' project the organisation has created a 'new ways of working' project to build upon its success.

The new customer relationship management system and the new website content management system will be used to enable channel shift and self service. These systems will allow high volume transactions currently dealt with in the call centre to be made available on the Council's website. The resulting reduction in workload will allow the Council to reduce the cost of service provision.

The advanced telephony system will be further exploited to make use of features such as presence and conferencing. The presence capability will improve the efficiency of the call centre by allowing agents to easily find back office expertise to help them deal with complex enquiries at the first point of contact.

The Council's staff are now dispersed over the whole of Melton Mowbray rather than being on a single site. The conferencing facility within the phone system will be used to allow meetings to be undertaken without the staff having to travel across the town. This will contribute to the green agenda, and lead to efficiencies both in staff time and travel costs.

The technology introduced will allow the Council to build a new office to be occupied in 2011 by the Council and other partner organisations from the public sector.

### **Summary of Success**

In the early summer of 2008 a fire ripped through Melton Borough Council's head quarters, gutting two thirds of the building and rendering the remainder unusable.

Dealing with the immediate aftermath of a fire is a daunting and stressful time for any IT project team. With nearly 50,000 customers relying on the Council for essential services the team was under pressure to deal with the immediate aftermath of the fire and return the business to normal.

The team successfully resurrected the organisation without the loss of a single days service to the Council's customers.

In the ensuing months the IT project team successfully planned and managed the migration back to premises within the Council's home town of Melton Mowbray.

The team seized upon the opportunity that the disaster presented to implement new technology and enable the organisation to transform itself.

The technologies introduced have transformed the way in which the Council operates and conducts business with its customers. The culture of the organisation has changed and a more dynamic and flexible workforce has evolved.

Services can now be delivered to vulnerable residents within the neighbourhoods, in which they live, making the services more accessible and allowing them to be delivered more efficiently.

Flexible workspaces and home working have been introduced allowing employees to work from where best suits the task in hand.

The amount of office space utilised by the organisation has been reduced leading to future and on going cost savings.