

Virgin Vie-ing for the best contact centres

When Richard Branson and the Virgin team looked to create a new cosmetics and jewellery brand, they decided their philosophy would be to be different by being better. Better quality, better service and better value. And this was to be achieved with Virgin's traditional style and sense of fun. Virgin gathered a team of experts from throughout the industry to produce the perfect range of premium quality products, and the results were astonishing. And this was based around the fact that if you couldn't get to the stores, being able to talk to one of their 10,000 trained Independent Consultants.



Overview

Client requirements

- Replace two legacy systems that supported two different locations
- Improve communications between network of UK consultants and support staff at Head Office

Alternative Networks' Solution

- Mitel 3300 IP Communications Platform (ICP)
- Mitel 6100 contact centre
- Mitel ACD Soft Phones

Results

- Installed in 2 weeks, enabling Virgin to go live before the Christmas ordering period
- One single and efficient centralised admin and management system
- Improved call handling and resolution of queries with a personalised approach
- Calculated overview of call centre performance for team leaders
- Enables Virgin to adopt flexible working practices for contact centre staff

The challenge

The 50-strong team at Virgin Vie's contact centre handle queries from these 10,000 independent consultants. Contact centre agents advise the consultants on everything from status of orders awaiting delivery, to invoicing queries, to updates on the latest sales and marketing materials. Neil Mainwaring, Senior Account Manager, Echo Communications Ltd – now Alternative Networks – said:

"Virgin Vie's existing telephony solution was coming to the end of its lifecycle and could not support the high level of interaction between agents and consultants. A Mitel IP solution was suggested to improve the quality of communications both for the contact centre agents using the technology and the consultants dialling in."

The solution

Virgin Group's cosmetic and jewellery business 'Virgin Vie At Home' needed to implement an IP-based contact centre solution to improve communications between its network of UK consultants and support staff at its West Sussex head office. The IP solution comprised the Mitel 3300 IP Communications Platform (ICP), Mitel 6100 Contact Centre Solution and the Mitel ACD Soft phone.

"I was delighted with the cultural fit between our teams. It meant that despite the pressures, issues and timescales those involved continued to be thorough, professional, constructive & good humoured throughout." Said Ian Chapman, IT Director, Virgin Vie at Home.

The Contact Centre Solution was installed in just two weeks from the signed order date and Virgin were able to go live in time for the Christmas order period. From having two different legacy systems that supported two different buildings, to one single centralised operation and management system, enabled Virgin to become more efficient.

The solution (continued)

Chapman said "The result of this strong team working was a very high quality implementation with only minor issues. The quality of the roll out did not happen by chance and was due in large part to the quality and attention to detail of work".

Soft phones were integrated into the contact centre and provides agents with an improved efficiency of call handling. Screen pops containing the customer's history and details automatically appear on the agent's screen when a customer calls. This results in a more personalised approach from the agent to the customer and also speeds up the resolution of the call.

The Interactive Contact Centre application also allows team leaders to access up-to-the minute information about call volumes, queues and agents' performance, while the Mitel Intelligent Queuing directs callers to the appropriate agent which ensures the call is handled correctly and reduces customer waiting time.

The results

A key consideration of the project was to provide a solution which could be developed to enable the adoption of flexible working practices for contact centre staff. Chapman said, "We are currently looking at the Mitel Teleworker Solution to enable agents to work from home. Operating in an area of relatively low unemployment, the retention of good quality agents is extremely important to us and the new IP solution enables us to adopt the flexible working practices, which makes us attractive as an employer, without compromising service and quality levels."

Impressed with the results of the implementation to date, Virgin Vie is already considering using the Mitel Teleworker solution to connect its 17 UK high street stores to the central contact centre, enabling the sharing of information regarding stock levels and customer orders. In addition, Echo is currently discussing future plans with Virgin Vie regarding the expansion of the multimedia capabilities of the Mitel contact centre, to enable consultants to log requests for information or assistance via email.

Graham Bevington, Managing Director, Mitel, said "The Virgin Vie implementation is a perfect illustration of how retailers can use the latest in IP communications technology to streamline their communications and operate more efficiently. Furthermore, it highlights how IT has a key role to play in realising wider business strategy, staff retention and flexible working practices in the case of Virgin Vie."

