

Integrated Control Centres are helping to deliver record levels of punctuality on our railways. Improving the response to incidents plays a key part. At the Swindon ICC we are helping to increase the efficiency of control centre staff even further using our CallTouch software.

Getting people talking at Swindon

CASE STUDY



Reducing service disruption

Punctuality on the railways is at an all time high. Network Rail have identified that the improved response to operational incidents, leading to a quicker time to get the railway back to normal, is a key factor. In particular, the use of integrated control centres, which bring Network Rail people and Train Operating Company controllers together under one roof, is allowing them to work closely to quickly resolve incidents.

In March 2009, Network Rail and First Great Western moved their shared Integrated Control Centre (ICC) to a new site at Western House in Swindon. From here, 18 staff from Network Rail and 26 from First Great Western manage railways across London, the Thames Valley, the South West and Wales.

As part of the move Network Rail implemented Northgate's CallTouch software, which has helped them better manage disruption and further reduce delays to passengers.

How CallTouch helps

CallTouch is a touchscreen-based software tool that reduces the time it takes to make and receive telephone calls. This gives operators more time to concentrate on running a railway.

With Network Rail subject to severe financial penalties if the move was not completed by the end of March, time was of the essence. Northgate were able to reduce the original estimate by four weeks to go live on time, without compromising the scope or quality of the services delivered.

Benefits

Operators at the Swindon ICC are saving minutes per call compared with their previous system of paper-based directories and lists. CallTouch is based around an electronic directory, so outgoing calls can be made using a text-based search of the directory or a one-touch-dial hot key button. And by mapping CallTouch's pages to their standard processes, they have been able to reduce the time it takes to complete processes that involve multiple calls.

CallTouch is also reducing the time taken to handle incoming calls. All calls now reference internal directories and show the name or function of the caller. One of the benefits of this incoming call stack is that operators can choose the order in which they take calls. If they are waiting for specific

information, they can immediately pick up that call when it comes, rather than being given the one that has been waiting longest. This also means incidents are resolved quicker.

Furthermore, the incoming call queue means that operators can take calls for their busy colleagues. “It’s a team game” says Nick King, Route Control Manager at Swindon. “My controllers can see and answer all calls for their workgroup, not just those in their own geographical area. We won’t have an answer machine. It’s important to me that every call is taken.”

This capability is especially important in responding to emergency calls. At Swindon the 10 emergency lines which link to train radios and the emergency services each has a special “warbler” audio alert to raise the profile of the call. Nick King continues, “Because of the way calls are presented to all competent people, we

are able to answer emergency calls in 2 to 3 seconds. In an emergency, seconds count.”

Part of the package delivered by Northgate includes call analysis software, that enables Network Rail to determine their response times. Going forward, this will allow them to optimise the configuration of the system and the room layout, in order to ensure that they continue to improve efficiency and deliver saving by reducing call handling times further.

The resilience of CallTouch has led to increased reliability. CallTouch is based on a twin-server architecture, which means that the system will still keep running even if one server should fail.

Project success

Following closedown of the project, team members captured their thoughts on what had made the project run so successfully.

One aspect that came through strongly was early user

engagement. Senior control room operators were involved throughout the process, including the original requirements capture and specification. As a result of this it became apparent that both Network Rail and First Great Western had different processes. Because this was known at an early stage in the project, these requirements could be accommodated within the project timescales.

Effective training was also cited. Although the Northgate software is designed to be intuitive to use, ensuring that operators were effectively trained was a key feature of the project success. Training was undertaken using a two-desk simulator over a three week period right up to two to three days before go live, with the Network Rail trainers able to use operational scenarios to guide the trainees in dealing with the actual events they are likely to encounter. This activity on its own pulled back three weeks from the original project timescale.

Let’s talk

With Northgate you get cost-effective innovation from public service experts. We help you increase efficiency and provide excellent service. Let’s meet and discuss it.

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