

Transport for London have built a new control room as part of their CoLoc project to improve surface transport services. They can now handle incoming and outgoing calls significantly faster than before using Northgate's CallTouch communications software.

Getting people talking at TfL

CASE STUDY



“A consolidated, accurate directory must in itself save more than 15 seconds per call.”

A complex challenge

London's bus network is one of the largest and most comprehensive urban transport systems in the world. Every weekday, over 6,800 scheduled buses carry around six million passengers on over 700 different routes. The individual buses are run by private operators under contract to London Buses, a part of Transport for London (TfL), the organisation charged with implementing the Mayor of London's Transport Strategy.

“Our strategy is to make radical improvements to bus services across London - increasing the bus system's capacity, improving reliability and increasing frequency of services,” says Andy King, who leads the CentreComm team for London Buses.

The CentreComm team are the people entrusted with the day to day implementation of this strategy. They recently moved into a new purpose-built facility in Central London, as part of a TfL initiative known as ‘the project for the co-location of surface transport & traffic control rooms’, or simply CoLoC.

By bringing together all the agencies responsible for co-ordinating surface transport - CentreComm, London Streets Traffic Control Centre, British Transport Police, London Underground, the Metropolitan Police Surface Transport and Traffic Operations Room - communications between the agencies will be facilitated and operational effectiveness will increase, delivering an improved transport system. In addition to the CoLoC project,

there is a facility within the complex for a Transport Co-ordination Centre (TCC) that will be used during the 2012 Olympics.

Saving time on calls

One of the imperatives in the move to the new location was ensuring that control of both radio and telephone communications was optimised to increase the effectiveness of the team by minimising the time required to make and take calls. TfL selected Northgate's CallTouch communications control solution, which is currently in use at a number of other TfL sites including London Underground's Power Control Room and Network Operations Centre.

CallTouch is used to provide access to both the telephone

“Let's make change work”

network and the iBus radio system, which provides an emergency communications channel with all of London's 8,500 buses, as well as continuously monitoring their position to provide accurate times for arrival at bus stops. CallTouch uses advanced communications software through a touchscreen user interface to provide tools for operators to save significant amounts of time on handling both incoming and outgoing calls.



Andy's CentreComm team is divided into two groups of operators - the incident response team, who will take the first call and resolve an incident, and the network response team, who will deal with the effect that has on the rest of the network. "This is an emergency call centre. Every call must be answered, and quickly," says Andy.

As Andy explains, Northgate's CallTouch software can save

operators time in taking incoming calls. "Calls are shown as a queue on the touchscreen, with caller details and how long the call has been waiting presented for each call. Operators can choose which call they want to take next according to their own priorities, which will be relevant to the incident they are dealing with. For instance, if an accident occurs at Baker St, every bus operator will be on the phone clogging the oncoming lines - the operator dealing with resolving that incident can filter out all other unrelated calls to answer the phone to the people he needs to speak to there and then, leaving the network response team to deal with the other calls."

It's not just incoming calls where CallTouch can help, though, as the software has several tools for speeding up the process of making outbound calls as well. As Andy notes, "CallTouch uses pages of one-touch dialling buttons, so to call someone at a particular garage, it's just a matter of a couple of screen presses to select the right page and then the right person".

In addition, CallTouch uses a central text-based directory which quickly enables a search on a particular individual.

"We've done away with all the paper-based directories we used to have, which were never up-to-date, and now have one consolidated, accurate computerised directory," says Andy. "That in itself must save more than 15 seconds per call".

Improved Outcomes

With an average of 1,500 emergency calls received from buses in a 24 hour period, leading to the creation of 1,500 incidents and a total of 15,000 incoming and outgoing calls per day, a saving of 15 seconds per call equates to a reduction of 62.5 hours per day, or around 1.5 hours per operator per shift. That's one and a half hours out of a 12-hour shift available to deliver improved operations for London Buses, which must help in delivering TfL and the Mayor for London's transport strategy.

Users like CallTouch too. Fred Whelan, one of Andy's team explains, "This system is fantastic. It is just so easy to use. I can quickly decide who I need to call as the directory is structured according to route numbers. It's just a few screen presses to make a call. I can see who is calling in, and decide whether to take the call according to my current priorities. It's just made my life so much easier".

Let's talk

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