

Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow

A study into Smarter Working

It has been said many times that a little bit of snow and the country grinds to a halt. This week, the country has been hit harder than usual making it almost impossible for people to get to their work without great inconvenience. The traffic announcers will often say “do not travel unless you need to”. In a lot of cases people will ignore this as they feel that there are important meetings or tasks that require them to be at the office or with a customer.

“Technology kept us going”

While these figures can be subjective, there is no getting away from the fact that business can suffer and this suffering is mainly down to the lack of ability to communicate. Within Green Cloud we are blessed with some great technologies and solutions that can literally change the way we work. While we are not the only company, let alone the first, to make solutions that help people communicate, our advantage is that they are solutions that are easy to implement and do not require specialist, costly technology. The last two days have seen the majority of Green Cloud employees reassess their plans and diaries. However, as this document will highlight, through the use of our own solutions, this has had little or no impact on their ability to carry out their duties. In some cases, it has been a revelation that they can actually be more productive when they realise the benefits that unified communication solutions can bring to the way they operate. I undertook a quick, unscientific poll on people in the Communications and RMS sectors to capture their experiences. I will summarise their responses and feedback under various categories based on their reactions. Many people highlighted the same benefits. The common theme was that in most cases they were delighted with the experience and surprised at just how well they were able to work. It has shown that distance and location do not have to be barriers to work effectively.

TRAVEL

Most people were forced to stay at home. Even a short commute was impossible due to not being able to get out of their driveway. Those that did try were faced with much delay and danger on the roads. Even if they did get to work, other colleagues or customers had to pull out of planned meetings making their journey unnecessary. Those that stayed at home saved many hours travelling time even compared to a normal day. Without taking time into consideration, and imagining the cost in terms of money and health of just one accident in these conditions, one can see the benefits immediately.

WHAT WAS USED INSTEAD?

We are lucky inside Green Cloud by being provided with broadband links, mobile devices and laptops. However what made these facilities work was the addition of:

- Live Meeting
- Office Communicator
- Web Cams, Roundtables
- USB headsets

The extra ability to connect to mail (OWA) and instant messaging (Browser based IM) through any browser also meant that wherever people had access to the internet, they could get connected. All these solutions are simple and cost effective to implement. As we can see above, they do not need specialist equipment or training.

IMPACT ON PLANNED MEETINGS

Some customer meetings were cancelled. Many of these were cancelled because the customer was unable to travel or connect and work as smartly as we can. Many customer meetings were amended quickly and conducted using conference calls initiated through Communicator. Although the customer representatives were unable to get together, we could achieve this on their behalf through our solutions. For some, it was the first time they had been exposed to a Live Meeting, but all it needed was an email invite and they were able to connect seamlessly. Many people found that meetings conducted through a conference call or Live Meeting was more productive than being face to face. There was more focus on the agenda and less interruptions as questions could be easily handled through the Q&A manager and instant messaging. People found they were able to fit in more calls and virtual meetings as they did not have the travel time between meetings to consider.

TYPES OF MEETINGS CONDUCTED

Every type of meeting was catered for. These ranged from one to one and team meetings, all the way up to a full departmental meetings, covering both internal and customer facing presentations. In one case we were able to transition an all hands, divisional meeting to a live meeting with 32 attendees and 7 different presenters with only an hour's notice. As is commonplace for these quarterly meetings, there is a directive for everybody to be there as important information is going to be presented. Early that morning, the director foresaw problems with the weather, emailed everybody to tell them not to travel and provided a link to the Live meeting. Even the presenters stayed at home. The meeting lasted for over 4 hours and had a mixture of PowerPoint, Spread sheets, and videos. It went flawlessly and the use of Roundtables and webcams ensured that people felt involved. Just as importantly, it stopped over 30 people trying to travel in, or having to find another suitable date in the near future.

EASE OF USE

For most people, the technology 'just worked'. Using Roundtables or Webcams automatically provided video conferencing where necessary.

OCS means you can always see if a colleague or partner is available without having to be in the same location.

PRODUCTIVITY

Many people were pleasantly surprised that not being in the office did not affect the amount and quality of work they could get through.

Certainly, people welcomed not having to make long journeys just to get to the office. The presence capabilities of OCS made them feel 'connected' to their colleagues as they knew if they could reach them or decide the best way to communicate.

As mentioned earlier, face to face meetings do incur extra time, either by supplementary discussion or simply by having to walk to different buildings to find meeting rooms. This alone can give a person back an hour a day.

COST SAVINGS

While difficult to measure in such a short survey, one can easily see that there are plenty of areas that helped reduce direct and indirect costs. Here are some that were mentioned;

- Travelling expenses, either by car or public transport
- Catering for large meetings
- CO2 emissions
- Using communicator instead of mobile calls (many people mentioned they used their mobile far less)
- Time saved by not having to rearrange meetings

