

UK's Largest Union Improves Mobility, Flexibility and Collaboration with Opus

Unite the Union

Profile Summary

Industry Trade Union

Employees 1250

Members 1.3 Million

Operating in 80+ sites in 11 regions throughout UK, Ireland, The Channel Isles and Gibraltar.

Organisation Overview UK's largest trade union with 1.3 million members nationwide and beyond.

Requirements To replace end of life communications, consolidate suppliers and gain flexibility, mobility and collaboration, to further support members.

About Unite

Formed out of the merger between Amicus the Union and the Transport and General Workers Union, Unite the Union is the largest trade union in the UK. It has 1.3 million members, 1,250 employees, in 80 office across the UK, the Channel Island and Gibraltar, supported by 20 IT staff.

Its mission is to provide a level of support to members and individuals with an interest in trade union activities including political objectives both from a legal perspective and a collective bargaining point of view for improvements in terms and conditions, together with salary.

We spoke to IT Director Paul Mease about how the relationship between Unite and Opus came about and Paul's experience of partnering with Opus.



Unite IT Director, Paul Mease

The Situation

Prior to engaging with Opus, Unite had a legacy telephone system that was approaching its end of life. Their existing provider was recommending an alternative solution which would have required replacement handsets across the estate which represented a considerable expense, given the number of employees.

As a new head of IT, Paul put together a competitive tender process which Opus were invited to bid for, along with other providers.

Having established the Unite requirements Opus recommended Mitel's resilient virtual MiVoice Business systems on their existing VMware servers, utilising both their existing VPLS infrastructure and existing Mitel handsets offering significant financial advantage, together with a proven platform.

First Impressions

According to Paul, the first impressions of Opus were excellent. The fact Unite were already using Mitel handsets made the solution cost effective and gave Unite a high level of confidence that the solution would work and they were able to see, exactly what they would be getting in terms of features and functionality, having demonstrated the proposed solution at Mitel's London showroom.

Implementation

Talking about the implementation of the new solution, Paul explained that the project was very much a collaborative exercise with key objectives being defined and training planned for the 20 IT staff in different Unite locations. There was a phased roll out of the project with two systems operating for a period in what Paul described as an extremely successful deployment.

Paul explained there had been some challenges along the way as the true complexity of the telephony requirements of the organisation became apparent but after a period of fine-tuning, Paul's team do not have to get involved with the telephone system any more.

Paul went on to say "it's an amazing piece of kit, there are no issues and we have full redundancy between our London and Newcastle data centres which we have tested and all works fine. If either system is shut down the other kicks in. We have many occasions when offices need to be closed and we simply redirect to the head office – everybody is extremely happy with the system."

Paul talked about how Unite have gradually adopted more of the unified communications, initially using the solution purely as a telephone system but now using secure instant messaging audio conferencing and video conferencing, with everybody using the desktop client to provide presence and availability. All previously used video conferencing services have been ceased, reducing ongoing costs.



Unite the Union Regions

Training

The new services were deployed in a phased roll out, with no unscheduled down time.

Training was provided in the form of classroom demonstrations, product workshops and breakout sessions, which made the various members of the Unite team aware of the products and applications which were available to them.



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Benefits

Talking about the benefits the new communications had delivered to Unite, Paul explained that significant capital outlay for a system that offered no additional benefits had been avoided, which was great news for Unite's Chief of Staff and its members.

To achieve more for a lower cost was a win-win for everybody and consolidating video suppliers has resulted in a significant cost saving to Unite. Paul also explained that call costs had been reduced as Unite no longer had 11 separate entities as far as telephone systems and lines was concerned and everything is now on one bill.

Having centralised access to all call data and analytics has revealed that the telephone is still a massive part of Unite's communication strategy with typically 16,500 inbound calls per week. Unite are now able to access busy calling periods and adjust resources if necessary or route calls to available staff.

Hidden benefits to members are that calls to key offices are seamlessly overflowed to other offices if all staff are busy, making it easier to get in contact with Unite. Secure instant messaging has increased the percentage of first-time resolutions on calls from members. Call recording has meant that incidents of staff being abused has reduced and staff feel better protected.



Reception at the Unite London Office

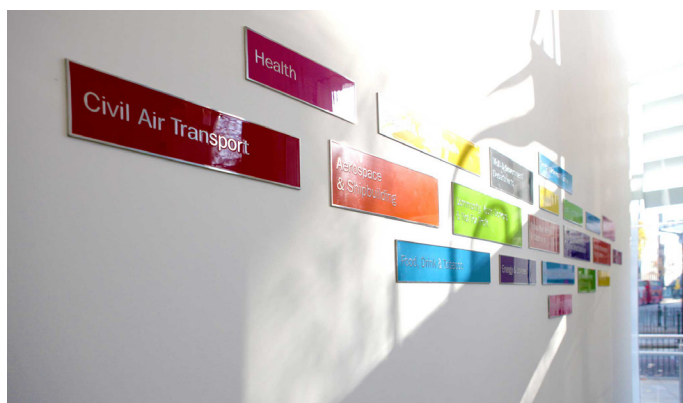
Technology Partner

Paul talked about the relationship with Opus and how it has developed over time to the point where Opus are essentially a technology partner, that the Unite team can talk to about new features and requirements.

Paul described the level of transparency within Opus as excellent, with a very clear escalation path published on the website, for all Unite staff to access if needed. Paul explained that any issues raised had been dealt with professionally and he saw the relationship with Opus as a long-term thing and said the support staff had all been excellent and very different to previous suppliers.

Paul recognised the value that Opus brought in managing issues with vendor partners, even helping resolve issues prior to formally managing services.

Paul also commented on the longevity of staff within Opus, which suggested to Paul that Opus were "looking after their staff", which sat well with the trade union values of Unite. Other suppliers had appeared to change account managers every few months which was uncomfortable for Unite.



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Additional Services

Based on the success of the Mitel communications, once the contract with their existing network supplier was up for renewal, Opus along with other suppliers were invited to tender for Unite's leased line infrastructure. With a strong emphasis on support, Opus were successful in winning that contract and have begun rolling out the new connectivity.

In Summary

In summarising his experience of partnering with Opus, Paul described the service and support as excellent.

Paul went on to say that the deployment of the Mitel communications had been one of the first projects that he'd been responsible for with the IT team and the fact it had been so successful, had elevated the reputation of the IT team and gained them greater trust within the organisation.

Customer Benefits

- Unified communications
- Presence and availability
- Mobility and collaboration
- Consolidation of suppliers and services
- DR and resilience
- Reduced operational costs
- Return on investment



Unite the Union London Office

“Partnering with Opus has elevated the perception of the Unite IT team within the organisation. The kit is fantastic and the service and support from Opus is excellent.”

Paul Mease, IT Director

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