



REMOVING COST WHILST IMPROVING SERVICE AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION



a&o has a mix of site based engineers and those who are mobile, moving from job to job in order to manage customers' IT infrastructure. Jobs vary from high volume, low complexity such as mouse and keyboard replacement to low volume, high complexity such as servers and printers requiring specialist skills.

THE NEED TO COMPETE

“Providing IT services including installation, maintenance and support for desktop, server and network assets is difficult in a highly competitive market” said Brian Wathen, Client Services Director at a&o. “It is very much a commodity business which makes it hard for companies to differentiate themselves, so being price competitive is absolutely crucial. We chose to innovate not only to reduce cost but also to deliver service differently. Customers are no longer attracted by price alone, it is how we execute and guarantee our service that matters.”

UNDERSTANDING THE OPERATION

An important part of this process was the adoption of the Active Operations Management (AOM) a methodology generally considered to be a culture change programme with a computer application attached with promised productivity improvements in excess of 20%. “One obvious area for cost reduction and performance improvement was our 125 strong field engineering operation,” said Brian Wathen. “When you have staff in the field, the key challenge is to keep them busy without compromising quality. We started off by analysing the historic profiles and patterns of work, which enabled us to identify the busiest periods. For example we found that Tuesdays were the busiest days and Thursdays the quietest. We also came to fully understand the difference between operations in different parts of the country. This allowed us for the first time to predict our workflows, and plan to smooth out the regular peaks and troughs while still being able to accommodate urgent calls and unusual fluctuations in demand,” continued Wathen.

THE SOLUTION

With this new insight a&o decided to search for the technology that would help it make the best use of its resources, identifying an integrated scheduling and mobility solution at the top of the list. A selection process then ensued resulting in the appointment of 360 Scheduling with its partner Cognito providing the real-time mobility solution. 360's ability to integrate with Cognito's mobile data platform and with a&o's existing back end service management system was a key criterion in this selection process.

ABOUT A&O

a&o systems + services UK Ltd is a leading independent IT infrastructure services provider, delivering flexible multi-vendor, multi-technology field, on-site and project services throughout the UK and Western Europe. The company employs some 2,500 people and delivers services directly to medium-sized commercial organisations and public sector bodies; or in partnership with IT outsourcers, service providers or original equipment vendors.
www.a0-services.net



The fully integrated 360 Dynamic Scheduling Engine (DSE) takes jobs from the service management system and applies a complex series of business rules including details of engineer skills and competencies in order to produce the daily work schedules. The business rules were developed by all three parties to ensure the best performance. The new system also recognises a complete change to a&o's logistics operation which is now completely outsourced. Apart from a small amount of van stock, parts are now shipped directly to strategically located drop boxes so that engineers can pick up parts en route and drop off faulty parts when convenient. By analysing customer and serviced equipment locations, a&o selects the best places for its stock to be held.

COMPLETE FIELDFORCE VISIBILITY

Start of the day schedules are now dispatched automatically to engineers' Cognito enabled PDAs via the Cognito managed network. The PDAs are GPS enabled and feeds are fed directly back into the 360 DSE. In the Service Centre the 360 Workbench provides a real time view of each engineer. A separate map view displays current location.

The 360 DSE works dynamically in real time altering schedules as circumstances change. Engineers only receive one job at a time but they do have visibility of the next job. This is a real change from previous practice when engineers would choose the order in which they carried out the jobs in their schedule. Engineers appreciate the fact that the system has practically eliminated the need to key-in information and that schedules take them much closer to home at the end of a shift.

In the service centre 4 dispatchers now handle the scheduling task, formerly handled by 12, a significant saving in itself. Service centre staff no longer need to re-key data into the service management system and the 360 DSE handles 80% of the scheduling task. This has enabled the reallocation of some manual resource to other areas of the business.

FIELD PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY

"With the innovations we have made in the last year we have reduced our fieldforce from 125 to 70 engineers. They handle approximately 4000 incidents a month, a mix of reactive break/fix, project work and backfill. In reality we still have spare capacity in the system so we can handle more," said Brian Wathen. "Significantly we have improved our ability to meet service levels by between 4% and 5% providing us with a 98% service level against contract with 2 extra jobs per engineer per day.

We have also been able to raise our measure of customer satisfaction simply because our engineers now arrive on time and because we are now able to keep our customers informed. As the operation evolves we use outputs from the 360 DSE to feed back into our planning tool so that we continue improve our performance," continued Wathen.

The introduction of new technology has enabled a&o to change its business processes, improve its service performance and levels of customer satisfaction with customer testimonies now used routinely in the sales process.

"The 360 DSE handles 80% of the scheduling task and our dispatchers are now focussed almost entirely on exceptions that fall outside the established business rules. Because they have complete visibility of the field operation they are able ensure that urgent jobs or SLAs in jeopardy are handled efficiently and customers kept informed,"

Brian Wathen,
Client Services Director