



Gary Dalton, Head of ICT at Purcell is justifiably proud of the role that IT plays in the business. It has been a strong enabler for change.

In 2009, it became clear that following a period of strong growth to hit a £10m turnover, the near future was going to become tougher as the wider economy slowed down. Architecture, with its strong link to the construction sector would potentially suffer more than most.

To maintain a strong financial position in a static market would mean reducing costs. To keep their hard won reputation meant not compromising on the product. Both sides of the value equation were key.

Travel and accommodation was an obvious target. Yet, Purcell's business model, based on maximising the use of sector specialists spread across thirteen different offices, required frequent travel for team meetings to drive projects forward. To lose the face-to-face contact could severely compromise the ability of the organisation.

THE WHITES OF THEIR EYES

The decision was taken to go for a video conferencing solution with hosting provided by SICL.

Reflecting on the effectiveness of the system from a user perspective,

“OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE SOLUTION IS EXCELLENT SO FAR WITH INCREASED AUDIO AND VIDEO QUALITY”

Gary explains:

“It is so much better than a voice call - you can see the whites of their eyes. You can hide in a voice call, but not in a video conference.

Everyone has a 'tell' - the way they respond facially when they have understood you - or not.

Their expression can give you a lot about what they are about to say. You get none of that in a voice call.”

User adoption was rapid. As became abundantly clear on first usage, whilst not quite the same as a face-to-face meeting, it is a very close second for most meeting purposes.

GREEN CREDENTIALS

A bonus for Purcell was that cutting all that travel out gave them much lower carbon emissions. This played a significant role in their successful entry into the Sunday Times Top 50 Green Companies - an acclaimed badge of honour in the architectural sector.

OPPORTUNITY IN END-OF-LIFE

In 2013, having seen a positive impact on both working practices and the cost line, Purcell found themselves at a natural decision point. The manufacturer of the video conference bridge they had purchased announced that they would be withdrawing ongoing

support for the system due to its age.

The simple solution would have been to upgrade to the replacement model. This was likely to cost in excess £25k with an ongoing £5k per annum, in line with existing spend levels. Taking the 3-year spend of £40k as an upper limit, alternatives were explored.

Gary called the account manager, Liam Morris, from their longstanding IT partner, SICL. In briefing SICL, Gary had full confidence in their ability to come back with a solution:

“THE GREAT THING ABOUT SICL IS THAT THEY ARE ALL TECHNICAL GUYS. TECHNICAL GUYS WHO SELL STUFF.” THERE IS NOTHING MORE ANNOYING THAN A SALES GUY WHO HAS TO GO AWAY AND ASK FOR HELP WHEN THE CONVERSATION GETS TOO DIFFICULT. THAT JUST DOESN'T HAPPEN WITH SICL”

One of the additional challenges the business faced was an increasing desire from staff for more mobile based communications i.e. to join the video conference from a client site.

The decision was made to move the whole operation to a cloud-based video conference bridge (Easymeeting), whilst retaining use of the existing video endpoints.



The short term win was the cost saving – a 50% reduction against the anticipated upgrade costs would be realised over 3 years.

TRUE MULTI-DEVICE CAPABILITY

The new Easymeeting system has gone down well. Far more importantly, it has added a true mobile element to the offering with tablets, smartphones and laptops now fully enabled on the system. Staff are now able to log in from literally wherever they are, to participate in team meetings or speak to colleagues one-to-one.

PERSONAL IMPACT

Whilst the business itself saves money, works more effectively and picking up a green award along the way, it is the personal side where

“BACK OF AN ENVELOPE, WE SAW AN ROI IN 12 MONTHS ON A ROUGHLY £50,000 INVESTMENT – AND PEOPLE MUCH PREFER IT TO TREKKING UP AND DOWN THE MOTORWAY”

Gary Dalton, Head of ICT, Purcell UK

many people see the benefits. The flexibility it gives to individuals to better manage their time, to still take the call for the critical project without having to travel a couple of hundred miles translates into being home earlier and more often, to reclaiming a better balance between work and family. And that adds up to a happy workforce.

A TRUE VALUE ADD

Considering the moves as a whole, first to video conferencing and then the upgrade to the cloud with mobile capability, one of the more interesting consequences of the move has been more effective meetings. As Gary points out: “We still have the same number, but we have found that the ‘saying hello to everyone bit’ at the start is greatly reduced.

Meetings are more focussed and to the point.

That aspect is a true value add, that we had not appreciated in advance.”

Purcell is an architectural practice with a reputation for excellence established over six decades. Purcell has been involved in the care and development of some of the best loved buildings and places in the UK and abroad, including St Paul’s Cathedral and the British Museum. Their expertise includes funding and planning advice, heritage consultancy, conservation and architectural design.



SICL is an award-winning technology company specialising in IT service and solutions; on-premise, in the cloud and hybrid. Using its expertise, experience and accreditations, SICL helps organisations design, deploy and deliver IT services aligned to strategic aims.

From ‘datacentre to desktop’ SICL provides project and support services tailored to individual customer requirement delivering technical excellence with exceptional customer service.

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