

## INFORMATION FROM DATA



Established in 1992, Information From Data (IFD) provides data management software for use by local education authorities in England and Wales.

In the early days of his organisation, IFD Managing Director Geoff Abbot used to spend many hours on the road visiting clients and setting up conferences and workshops in hotels and conference halls around the country.

As a diabetes sufferer who occasionally needs to use a wheelchair, Abbot is prevented from driving so had to rely on train travel. However, this was proving to be expensive as he spent £10,000 a year on train tickets. Abbot believed the money and time he spent on trains could be far better used on improving his business and securing new clients.

### SOLUTION

Abbot turned to virtual conferencing technology provided by WebEx. The WebEx Meeting Centre provides the facility for online meetings, training sessions and conferences. The system integrates into existing PC systems including Microsoft Outlook and uses standard SSL encryption to ensure secure and private logins, accounts and meetings.

Using the WebEx Meeting Centre, Abbot is able to show full demonstrations of his company's software products via the web. Clients are able to view the presentation on their own PC and access files. The system also includes a messenger feature for instant communication.

### RESULTS

For Information From Data the benefits of implementing the WebEx Meeting Centre have been significant. "Using WebEx, where you are geographically is irrelevant. The system is very useful. I am able to fully demonstrate our software to clients without having to physically go and see them."

Abbot has been able to cut back dramatically on the £10,000 a year he used to spend on train travel and he has also been able to arrange meetings and training sessions on a more ad hoc basis than the physical workshops and conferences IFD previously held only 3 times a year.

"The same presentation that used to take hours during a workshop can be encapsulated via WebEx in an hour," Abbot says. As time restrictions are no longer an issue, IFD is able to spend more time training individual rather than groups of clients. This allows the company to provide a much more personal service, a factor in many of IFD's sales. Abbot and his staff are also able to conduct WebEx meetings from home.

The benefits of the WebEx system for IFD were demonstrated by the fact that one client agreed to purchase the company's software after taking part in a WebEx presentation without ever physically meeting the IFD team.

"I thought that WebEx could just cut down on the number of visits required. I didn't think clients would order using Webex," Abbot admits.

#### CHALLENGES

Although the advantages of the WebEx Meeting Centre have been significant, Abbot admits he has informed his staff to not forget the benefits of face-to-face meetings.

"We are wary of not losing touch with customers. It is imperative to still go and see most clients at least once as it's always better to put a face to a name. We are selling a service so that's important," he comments.

Another challenge for IFD is dealing with the inefficiencies of client's systems. For example, Some LEAs lack broadband which means the speed with which IFD prefer to demonstrate their services is reduced. Other clients are wary of using new technology which makes it harder to communicate the benefits of online meetings and training.

The simplicity of systems is another important issue for Abbot. "Sometimes technical experts make it difficult for users. Things have got to be easy to use otherwise people turn off. When conducting a meeting via WebEx we always phone the client beforehand to check everything is working correctly," he says.

#### THE LAST WORD

Information From Data will continue to demonstrate to LEAs the benefits of using their software to turn complex data into useful and meaningful information and online meetings play an important part in this process.

"We are branching out into more commercial and finance products such as time recording services which help education authorities identify which schools they need to be targeting for support," Abbot says.

Technology and the WebEx system has played an important part in the success of IFD which Abbot hopes will continue. "I sold a business many years ago that didn't even have a fax machine. Nowadays the expectations are so much higher. We can do things immediately. The whole process is so much easier. For me, the whole immediacy of communication is unbelievable."

