



## Work Wise UK Case Study: The ITC

### Synopsis

**The Challenge:** How to effectively manage a team of mobile consultants working across a wide geographical area whilst keeping administration manageable, communication costs to a minimum, and delivering top quality customer service.

**The solution:** Offer 'on the road' consultants the ability to work anytime from anywhere, using central file storage and document management via a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection to the office network, reliable and cost-effective communications using broadband technology, Voice-over-IP (VoIP) telephony and instant messaging applications to stay in touch.

**The results:** Consultants can visit a client, file a report and have it quality checked and ready for delivery without needing to visit the office. Central, networked file storage means no duplication of documents. Phone calls can be made anywhere an Internet connection is available. Clients get on-time, accurate reports and advice and consultants can work as and when they need to, fitting working life around family commitments and social life rather than vice versa.

## **Summary**

The ITC, based in North Wales, advises on how technology and eCommerce can best be used for business benefits. Our team of consultants are out and about across Wales visiting organisations of all sizes, working with them on a one-to-one basis, gathering information and researching best practice solutions, and filing reports. With such a geographically diverse and mobile team, effective communication is vital and frequent visits to the office are often not practical.

We practice what we preach to our clients and make use of a wide range of remote-working technologies to provide them with the best and most efficient service we can. Internet-based telephony and access to electronic information stored and updated on a central office server provide a team of mobile consultants with the tools to work when and where best fit their needs, and the needs of the clients.

These tools offer business benefits in terms of speed and responsiveness to clients' needs, and also allow consultants to fit work around home and family commitments rather than fitting these in with what the business demands.

### ***True remote working***

Advising clients on using technology to help their businesses succeed is The ITC's bread and butter, and flexible working facilitated by technology is a major part in enabling us to deliver our services. Our Work Wise accredited consultants are active across Wales, sometimes in very remote rural locations, and so we absolutely have to offer them a way to work that doesn't involve travelling to and from the office all the time. Also, the ability to visit a client, gather information and then file a report remotely, have it checked over and emailed back to the client, allows us to offer a fast turnaround time from consultant visit to final report delivery, whilst maintaining excellent standards of quality.

### ***Central information storage and access***

We often work with small businesses where one wrong decision on, say, investing in a Web site or major piece of ICT equipment can be the difference between profit and loss, or even the survival of the business. We implemented a central file server in the office and equipped all our consultants with laptop PCs and a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection. The VPN means every consultant has access to the central office file server wherever they have an Internet connection available. This allows them to receive and send reports, file administration 'paperwork' and access a central knowledge base of best practice advice, all as if they were sitting in front of an office network computer.

The central 'knowledge base', which consultants use to compile reports for clients, is kept up-to-date by remote staff working in Finland, Australia, England and North Wales, collaborating via the VPN and instant messaging technology. Consultants are informed



by eMail when new or updated information is available for them so they are always able to provide clients with the most accurate advice available.

### ***Virtual collaborative working***

A full client history and back records of reports is available to all consultants so that they can collaborate virtually on projects, using a combination of the central information store, emails, VoIP telephone calls and instant messaging to deliver our services – in the form of Web site review reports, information management advice, business process improvements and practical advice on business ICT infrastructure.

### ***Cost-effective communication through VoIP***

With a team of mobile consultants, and taking into account the poor current state of mobile phone network coverage in many rural parts of Wales, Internet telephony offered The ITC a practical and cost-effective way to keep everyone in touch. Every consultant is equipped with a laptop computer and connection to the company Voice-over-IP (VoIP) telephone network. Wherever a consultant can access the Internet, they have their own internal phone extension meaning that within-company calls are free. External calls are extremely cheap to make and quality is now comparable to standard telephone networks.

The system we use also incorporates a Web-based user interface, from where consultants can see who else is on line, look up an extension number, leave voice and instant text messages for colleagues and manage their messages and phone options. They simply log in with a password using a standard Internet browser and everything is available at the click of a mouse button. The VoIP system essentially provides a virtual office, linking the team of office-based staff to the consultants in the field, wherever they are online.

“It’s essential that we follow best practice in our work,” says Managing Director Charlie Bass, “We work with many of these technologies ourselves so we can pass on expert as well as personal experiences to our clients. As a small team, staff well being is vital, and I know happy staff will deliver for the business. Flexible working and using technology to make our daily business processes more efficient means we as a company can work smarter and make the most of the day, and we can deliver the best service to our clients every time.”

### ***‘Always on’ working***

Consultants are provided with the flexibility to work when and where they choose. Following a client visit they can note down anything relevant on their laptop and file these notes for later retrieval from the office server, via the VPN. This not only means that the information is available to anyone else in the company but it also provides data



security and safety as critical data is not stored locally on the consultant's laptop computer.

After visiting a client on site, information can be gathered from the office server and a report written and filed electronically right away from their laptop, leaving the next morning free for more appointments or other tasks. There's no need to wait for the office to open to send in a report or request client details from an administrator who might only reappear at 9am the next morning!

"It's great! I can visit a client whenever is convenient for them, and build my working day around that," says Susan John, one of our consultants. "Sometimes, it means I work in the evening to write up a report from an afternoon meeting, but all the central information I may need is available over the VPN, so I don't waste any time, and the next day is kept clear for another assignment. Or I may take the morning to do something totally different, as my own time."

### ***Flexibility to work and play***

Consultants and support staff can be 'in the office' wherever they are. For example, staff have in the past taken a long period of time away in another part of Europe on leave, working as and when required and still having time for relaxation and agreed holiday time, without having to travel back and forth.

We do not expect people to be 'at work' 24/7, far from it, but we are using technology to break the boundaries of the traditional 9-5 working week to offer us the flexibility and responsiveness to deliver the best consultancy services we can to businesses across Wales, whilst offering our consultants the opportunity to choose a work pattern that is a happy balance between their needs and our business requirements.

To date The ITC has delivered expert eCommerce advice to more than 1000 businesses across Wales, helping them use technology effectively and improve working practices as a result. A recent independent audit of ITC clients showed an average annual growth in turnover of 27.6%, an 11% decrease in staff time spent on repetitive tasks, and a 16% increase in job satisfaction.