



Case study

Industry sector:
transport and logistics

Virtual European call centre for ferry operator

A new converged environment for P&O Ferries' three European contact centres is boosting customer service, improving business resilience and increasing productivity

“The new BT solution has made a massive difference to the quality of service we are able to offer our customers.”

Mark Hollingdale
Reservations Operations Manager
P&O Ferries

Executive summary

The cross-channel passenger transportation business is fiercely competitive. As well as fighting off the Channel Tunnel, rival ferry operators, and low-cost airlines, P&O Ferries continually monitors its operations to make sure they are efficient and cost effective. The organisation must outperform its competitors with superior offers and industry-leading customer service. The business must also be able to operate in a 24*7 market, where downtime means considerable loss of revenue.

BT enjoys a close business relationship with P&O and, as a P&O Ferries trusted partner, it has worked tirelessly with the company to keep it abreast of the latest technology to support its business objectives.

P&O Ferries needed to integrate three contact centres in Dover, Rotterdam and Calais not only to lower costs and boost customer service but also to improve business resilience. BT created a roadmap to show how P&O could create a converged contact centre environment. BT then carried out the integration, providing a managed service to ensure the business kept functioning in the event of a system failure or major disaster. Other BT services have reduced agent and telecommunications costs and maximised customer satisfaction.

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Marketplace

Peninsular & Oriental (P&O) has reigned the seas for over 150 years. P&O Ferries – formed from P&O Scottish Ferries, P&O North Sea Ferries, P&O Irish Ferries, P&O Stena Line, and P&O European Ferries – is today a household name for short-haul sea travel. As the UK’s largest ferry operator, P&O Ferries carries freight and tourist traffic along North Sea, Irish Sea and English Channel routes. But it has not all been plain sailing over the last few years. Market downturns combined with increased competition in all areas of its business have kept P&O Ferries on its toes, striving to improve financial performance and deliver superior customer service.

Business opportunity

In order to improve the way it handled calls, P&O Ferries wanted to be able to accommodate peak loads more effectively, and balance call volumes across its three contact centres to maximise available resources. Servicing customers from Europe and the UK, P&O also had to be able to respond to enquiries efficiently and effectively in various languages – particularly English, French, German and Dutch – identifying the language required without the customer knowing they had been diverted to a contact centre that might be in another country.

Effective business continuity provisions were also becoming more and more critical to meet the requirements of a modern, contact centre-driven business where telecommunications failure could have a catastrophic effect on sales. Controlling call costs between the UK and Europe was also a problem. As a long-time partner of P&O, BT was asked to put together a roadmap for a converged contact centre environment and the supporting infrastructure.

BT solution

P&O Ferries has a local presence in numerous countries. Reservations Operations Manager at P&O Ferries, Mark Hollingdale, explains: “It has always been important for our customers to think that they are ringing a local office. One could have argued the case for just one centralised operation to service the entire European market, but there are good business reasons – not least resilience – to maintain local facilities.”

Chosen from a short list of possible solutions providers, BT implemented an IP-based call centre platform, which not only handles standard telephony PBX services but also integrates P&O’s three contact centres with the company’s bespoke reservation system. BT Contact Centre Service (CCS) works with an Avaya switch to route calls through to the right person with the right skill. For example, multilingual agents based outside the UK are alerted to the origin of each call, so that they can answer the call in the appropriate language.

Similarly, UK customers will not be aware that their call is sometimes being answered in France or Holland.

In routing calls from six countries to P&O's three contact centres in Dover, Rotterdam and Calais, BT CCS creates virtual in-country operations for P&O customers. There are local in-country Freephone numbers to dial, even though BT CCS actually delivers calls to the preferred contact centre location. The converged solution delivers voice and data to all P&O contact centre agents, significantly increasing productivity. They now get the information they need at the right time to provide a more responsive and effective service to P&O customers.

The integration of the three contact centres provides P&O with the resilience it is seeking. If a link or, indeed, an entire contact centre were to fail, the other contact centres could handle the traffic. P&O uses BT Customer Traffic Designer (CTD) to respond quickly and effectively to changes in its incoming traffic patterns. CTD enables P&O to change its routing plans on the fly to maximise agent efficiencies and customer satisfaction, or to respond to emergencies. For example, if one call centre were to go down the company could immediately change to its emergency routing plan, and revert to normal when the situation was corrected. All changes can be made by the customer from the desktop, and be seen on-screen taking place in real time.

Mark Hollingdale explains: "Data and voice communications now move between the contact centres, which are able to operate as a single, virtual entity. The resilience of the new converged system assures agent availability for all the company's inbound bookings right across Europe."

In addition to improving P&O's inbound operations with CCS, BT Voice Port was combined into the solution to address outbound call requirements. Instead of paying individually for calls between the UK and Europe, and not knowing what these variable costs would be, P&O now pays a simple, fixed cost per month for its outbound calls using BT Voice Port.

Why BT?

- BT is a trusted partner, and has worked with P&O to keep the company abreast of the latest technology required to support its business
- BT is highly responsive and provides 24*7 one-stop-shop call centre service and business continuity support
- BT Contact Centre Service has helped P&O establish a local presence in numerous countries, and minimise agent and telecommunications costs at the same time as maximising call centre efficiency, reliability and customer satisfaction
- BT Customer Traffic Designer enables P&O to instantly reconfigure its call centre infrastructure

"The BT solution is certainly cheaper than having to set up another contact centre in Europe. For example, with BT Voice Port the cost of making international calls from the UK to Europe is insignificant compared with the expense of creating an office, staffing it up and supporting it," says Mark Hollingdale.

Results

P&O's callers and agents have been connected to each other more efficiently across multiple contact centres, and the company's investment in costly call routing technology has been minimised. "The new solution has made a massive difference to the quality of service that we are able to offer our customers," says Mark Hollingdale.

The fact that BT has been able to integrate P&O's three sites into one virtual contact centre means that call flows have been levelled out, enabling peaks and troughs in call traffic to be shared across the sites. Multilingual agents can be utilised more cost-effectively and productivity has been improved. (It has been found that companies with three or more call centres see their agents working on average between 10 and 30 per cent more efficiently when BT CCS and its intelligent routing features are used. This translates into major savings in agent time and improved customer service.)

Previously, the responsibility for different parts of international circuits rested with that country's PTT, and resolving line failures was often a time-consuming and labour-intensive process. Now BT provides P&O with a 24*7 single point of contact for all faults and queries. Mark Hollingdale says: "In the old days, if we had a major problem with the lines we were really stuck. We effectively had no business. BT now provides a one-stop-shop and a highly responsive service."

BT Voice Port has reduced international call costs and helped P&O Ferries manage its budget far more easily. By switching from a paid (per call) service to the Voice Port Max flat rate option, P&O Ferries estimates that it is saving £240,000 a year. All these factors, together with the convergent capabilities of the BT-provided, IP-based switch, have enabled the BT solution to provide a return on investment in a mere 18 months.

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Technology blueprint

PBXs in the 480-seat Dover and 40-seat Rotterdam (Europoort) contact centres are connected by BT 2Mbps IP links. BT circuits also link P&O's 40-seat Calais contact centre into this virtual environment via a combination of 2Mbps and 1Mbps links, so that calls and data can be transferred between all three contact centres during busy periods but, critically for customers, maintain local number presence.

Mark Hollingdale says: "We want to exploit IP, and are converting all of our old systems over to it. Once this has been done, it will be down to us to decide whether to go for MPLS architecture. The way technology is moving on, this will be in the shorter rather than longer term."

Inbound calls to the P&O contact centres travel via TDM (Time Division Multiplexing) voice circuits through BT Contact Centre Service (CCS), a hosted call distribution environment running over BT's intelligent circuit switched network. The IP-based call centre's skill-based routing software takes a call from BT CCS and then determines which agent it will be presented to, based on an algorithm that finds an agent with the experience to deal with the specific query in the fastest time – resulting in a quicker and more efficient service.

P&O Ferries uses BT Customer Traffic Designer (CTD) to manage and configure its own inbound call routing plans. BT CTD is a web-based and password-protected 40-bit SSL encrypted tool that, for example, enables the re-routing of calls to the first available contact centre in the event of system failure.

Main BT products & services

- BT Contact Centre Service is a global, inbound telephony service that includes many advanced routing features, multiple access options and customer controlled routing plans, all of which are designed to maximise call centre efficiencies and caller satisfaction
- The BT-supplied, IP-based environment provides PBX and call centre services, and intelligent call routing
- BT Voice Port is a global outbound voice service with three pricing/access options – including BT Voice Port Max offering a flat monthly rate



Offices worldwide

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