



Horizon helps retailers' champion bira deliver a more personal service



About bira

Britain's independent retailers are seeing an upturn in business as shoppers turn their backs on big chains and supermarkets and choose instead to shop at smaller independent retailers where they can expect a better, more personal service. It's all music to the ears of bira - the British Independent Retailers' Association - the leading retailers' champion, trade association and support organisation.

Personal service matters to bira too. When it needed to consolidate and update the telephony systems at its two sites in Birmingham and Banbury it had to be done in a way that did not compromise the personal service it offers to its thousands of members. Among the telecoms specialists it talked to, only one - Gamma - could offer a hosted, cloud-based service with manned reception consoles for telephonists to answer and route calls.

“Our members depend on the strength of the personal service they offer their customers and they expect a similar service when they call us. With Horizon we can do that. Callers are greeted by a receptionist, not an automated voice system, so they aren't left hanging on. Meanwhile we're saving thousands of pounds on hardware and maintenance and no longer have any worries about resilience”

David Wilson, Systems Manager, bira

The challenge

Formed from the merger of the British Hardware Federation and the British Shops and Stores Association, bira was faced with having two established headquarters locations, each with its own aging telephony system that was becoming difficult and costly to maintain. In addition each relied on expensive, inflexible ISDN connections. With replacement the only real option, bira wanted a solution that required no on-premises PBX hardware yet delivered a manned switchboard presence at each location and that could answer, transfer and forward calls under the control of receptionists.

Crucially - still haunted by memories of a two-week ISDN failure that frustrated inbound callers - the new system had to have the resilience to cope seamlessly with outages and disruptions. At the same time bira was hoping to part fund the project by axing its costly ISDN30 lines, reducing call charges and eliminating hardware maintenance costs. A VoIP solution was the obvious choice but there were real concerns on the part of the bira IT team over voice quality and drop outs, while wanting to present a more personal, non call centre-like experience to bira's discerning, customer service-focused membership.





The solution

Following an on site demonstration by Gamma of the high level of voice quality possible with VoIP, bira chose our Horizon hosted, cloud-based platform to support more than 70 extensions across both its locations.

Connected by our Assured ADSL service and by a third party Ethernet solution respectively, Horizon met all bira's requirements for continuity and, importantly, allowed call answering and handling at both locations from easy-to-use 'drag and drop' reception consoles.

We ended bira's reliance on ISDN lines, a technology in which it had lost faith, and with Horizon provided new resilience and flexibility to the organisation. For example, where previously they could not transfer calls between locations, calls can now be answered and directed from each location interchangeably.

Horizon also works with reception consoles, something other vendors were not even familiar with let alone able to provide. Using these consoles, bira's trained receptionists can answer callers in a speedy and professional manner and deliver the personal touch which is lacking with automated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems.

The consoles also provide active presence indication allowing receptionists to see whether people are at their desks, on a call already or unavailable. Configurable hunt groups ensure callers are always answered promptly.

The benefits

- Reliable and flexible communications with the personal touch so important to bira's members in their dealings with the organisation
- Estimated savings of tens of thousands of pounds through elimination of PBX hardware, maintenance and ISDN circuits. 100% payback within five years
- Virtual linking of two sites giving callers a seamless experience regardless of which location they call into - without delays and without call-backs
- No more calling multiple providers and multiple helpline numbers in the event of faults and failures - one call to Gamma gets it done, quickly and efficiently
- Inherent resilience through Horizon's linking of the two locations and the ability to overflow to mobiles when needed
- Effectively doubled the manpower available to deal with callers without the need to take on extra staff
- Ability to better cope with contingencies and weather extremes by routing calls to staff at home or on mobiles

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