



## Vertex Customer Management

### Viewpoint

*“Vertex Customer Management is trusted by many leading organisations to manage millions of customer interactions every year. It combines skills in consulting, technology and outsourced service provision to deliver superior levels of customer service. It’s our responsibility to deliver business continuity, reduce costs and complexity and provide the right applications to users”*

**Mark George**  
Vertex Customer Management



### Meeting the Martini challenge

Vertex Customer Management is trusted by many leading organisations to manage millions of customer interactions every year. A subsidiary of FTSE 100 company United Utilities PLC, it combines skills in consulting, technology and outsourced service provision to deliver superior levels of customer service. Vertex employs over 9,000 staff in 69 UK and international locations including 1,500 in India and 700 in North America.

The adoption of thin computing using Wyse thin clients has enabled Vertex to quickly and easily scale its resources to meet the fluctuating demands of customers whilst significantly reducing the cost of owning and supporting an extensive user network and providing them with an improved working environment.

### Taking Action

Mark George is a key member of Vertex’s 5-man infrastructure team. The team is responsible for setting the strategy and standards for all IT infrastructure, network servers, desktops and application delivery to all users within Vertex and United Utilities. “We define the standards to which the infrastructure is supported and ensure that all line of business applications are available at any time, any place and anywhere” says George. “It’s our responsibility to deliver business continuity, reduce costs and complexity and provide the right applications to users.”

In 1998/9 Vertex operated two contact centres with 1,500 agents - one to handle electricity billing and the other water billing. The infrastructure comprised two data centres with UNIX-based billing engines and Windows NT 3.51 based desktop PCs. These were supported in-house. George comments: “We found the infrastructure very expensive to support. We could do little with the devices themselves because the bespoke applications running on them had been specifically written for the Windows NT 3.51 environment. Neither was it possible to roll out new applications in that environment.” The requirement for more feature-rich applications became a key driver in Vertex’s adoption of thin client technology. “It was clear that upgrading every PC was going to cost millions of pounds” says George. “We researched the market for alternatives and identified that Citrix MetaFrame and thin client desktops represented the most cost effective solution.”

**“We researched the market for alternatives and identified that Citrix MetaFrame and thin client desktops represented the most cost effective solution”**

In 2000 Vertex implemented Citrix to deliver applications to its existing, but now locked-down, desktop PCs. It also entered into a relationship with Capgemini to provide support to all Vertex and United Utilities

Continued...

users. "We initially aimed to use our PCs until they broke. As locked-down desktops they demanded less management attention and this reduced our support costs by about 50%. Nonetheless, they still needed supporting" says George.

Vertex continued to win external business that necessitated the rollout of further applications to additional contact centres. By 2001/2002 it had acquired other contact centre companies such as 7C (which included an operation in India), increasing its base to fourteen centres and 7,000 agents. As a result, it needed to manage its resources more effectively, distributing work between contact centres to accommodate the often fluctuating requirements of customers. "We realised that centralisation would provide us with a lot of business benefit in terms of continuity and flexibility" says George. "We could run any contract from any contact centre whilst sharing operations between them to support peaks in one operation with troughs in another. Otherwise we would have to have hundreds of applications running on each PC." Centralisation provided a natural progression to a full thin computing model using thin client desktops. Around the end of 2001, the team evaluated several vendors' products. "In doing so we looked not only for the right technical fit of the device but also for a vendor that would maintain a leading position in the market for at least the next 3-5 years" he says. "Wyse shone in our performance testing and we recognised its pedigree."

**"Whilst locked-down PCs reduced support costs, the Wyse thin clients were half as costly again, reducing our total support costs to 25% of the original"**

Vertex began implementing Wyse 3000 series, Windows CE-based, thin clients in 2002, using them as the sole desktop device in all of its new call centre operations. Simultaneously, it began replacing existing locked-down PCs as they reached the end of their useful life. George comments: "Whilst locked-down PCs reduced support costs, the Wyse thin clients were half as costly again, reducing our total support costs to 25% of the original." Meanwhile in Vertex's sister company, United Utilities North West, all desktop PCs were replaced with Wyse 1200LE thin clients where users didn't need specific peripheral devices.

## Conclusion

*"Thin computing using Citrix and Wyse thin clients has improved business all-round. The Vertex infrastructure team now has more time to concentrate on higher value projects; call centre agents have a more comfortable and rewarding work environment; customers have gained from a more flexible and efficient level of service and Vertex itself is benefiting from reduced operating costs"*

## Achieving Objectives

Today Vertex's contact centres are almost completely Wyse thin client based. "We now have approximately 2,000 Vertex agents using the Wyse devices and another 1,500-2,000 staff in United Utilities North West" says George. "They access all the major line of business applications including our multi-utility billing system, SAP, Office, call centre applications and asset management systems."

**"We've greatly reduced the complexity of our infrastructure... We've also drastically reduced the time and cost required to upgrade applications quickly"**

The adoption of thin clients has created several advantages for Vertex: "We've greatly reduced the complexity of our infrastructure. Whilst we had to overcome some centralisation and printing issues, we've seen benefits in the level of control it affords. We know where our information is as nothing is stored on individual desktops. We've also drastically reduced the time and cost required to upgrade applications quickly. Where previously we would have had to upgrade thousands of desktops, we now only have to upgrade 10-20 Citrix servers since the Wyse devices need little attention."

George also describes the user benefits: "The most obvious benefits to them are environmental. A small-footprint Wyse device and a flat screen create more space in their work area. They are a lot quieter and produce less heat too. These are important factors in a contact centre environment." Perhaps even more significant however, is the lack of interruption to users' work that thin clients create. "We experience very few issues with the Wyse devices" says George. "We no longer have contact centre agents waiting several hours for engineers as they did when using desktop PCs." Vertex now has virtually zero support calls regarding the Wyse thin clients.

The reduction in infrastructure and support costs is quantifiable according to George. "We found that deploying a Citrix server and Wyse thin client infrastructure was about 80% of the capital cost of deploying a traditional PC-based infrastructure. However, our operational and support costs fell by 60-70%." Furthermore, instead of requiring 20 staff to support a 2000 seat installation of servers and PC desktops Vertex is able to support that many thin clients with just 2-3 people.

Thin computing using Citrix and Wyse thin clients has improved business all-round. The Vertex infrastructure team now has more time to concentrate on higher value projects; call centre agents have a more comfortable and rewarding work environment; customers have gained from a more flexible and efficient level of service and Vertex itself is benefiting from reduced operating costs.