

A recipe for improved mobile communications

In another of our series of sponsored Customer Management specials we talk to Ian Walker, head of IT at Mark Wilkinson Furniture about his organisation's relationship with Active Digital and the business benefits it is achieving

Firstly Ian tell us about Mark Wilkinson Furniture and its position in the marketplace

The Company that bears Mark's name is based in Wiltshire and is widely represented throughout the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States. With its immense wealth of design, it is recognised as being at the forefront of its industry.

For the past 30 years The Robb Report has been written for the ultra-affluent connoisseurs of America, who are seeking the very best in life. The report covers homes and home design, yachts, cars, private aircraft and a number of other products to inform their sophisticated readership on which brands are the best.

"Mark Wilkinson Furniture creates the best kitchens in the world and is known for bringing precision furniture-making detail to kitchen and cabinet design."

How did MWF first get involved with Active Digital?

I first made contact via email following a Google search, Active Digital was just one of several companies I approached. Within the hour I had a call from Richard Groves, arranging to come and visit us in Wiltshire, which was more than at least one other company was prepared to do.

What were the key challenges and business drivers you were facing at that time?

I took over management of the mobile communications at the end of 2006 and soon found that we had users with poor coverage issues, lengthy delays whilst waiting for new handsets. Our billing was also causing our accounts department unnecessary work, due to unknown accounts on bills.

I also knew that as a growing company, with an increasing number of mobile we had outgrown our local 'one man band' supplier, and cost savings would follow, once we ported nearly half of our 72 handsets onto one account and tariff.

How have you worked with Active Digital to solve those challenges?

We have worked with Active Digital to merge our 2 network operators/3 tariffs, into one Network operator (O2) and one account - consisting of 72 users. I provided a list of users and number to Active Digital, we then summarised which handset, data package, and roaming each user would need. Some users use their handset to collect email from our IMAP server and the O2 data package was a more economical solution. We are about to start using the bill manager system to analyse call usage and where we can reduce costs or provide more suitable services, for example if we see that a field based user may require a data package, or international calling package.

Our accounts department is now able to receive one monthly bill, with each users' name against the number, which saves them time and me time also as I no longer have to look up numbers on our database. MWF is now saving a significant amount each month on line rental and call charges

The port of the existing Orange users at the end of July this year went amazingly smoothly, and Active Digital called all users in advance, dispatched handsets to the users direct, and provided support to the users who had technical problems transferring SIM cards.

What are the key business benefits to your business of the relationship?

Staff now receive replacement handsets by the following day, previously they often had to change their plans, eg. Come into the office to work whilst they awaited their new handset. Staff are able to call Active Digital direct with any problems, which has reduced workload for the IT department and allowed us to concentrate on other projects.

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I am now able to get through to our account manager straight away on the telephone, when I need to, and also, importantly, do the majority of correspondence via email which makes managing and recording 72 users changing requirements much easier task.

I also have the comfort of now knowing that if I ask a question or request anything it will get dealt with, which reflects better on our IT department also. Following the issue of higher quality camera phones we have reduced the need for digital cameras, which has also reduced costs.

What are your staff and customers saying about the work you are able to do as a result of the relationship?

Staff/Customers are saying very little, but that's the sign that we've done a

good job! In general though, staff are happier as the ones that had coverage problems are now able to use their handsets, and any staff that need replacements are able to go about their work again, much sooner than they were able to before.

How critical is the relationship to your business and how do you see it evolving in the future?

Although our relationship with Active Digital is still new, it has become invaluable in terms of the quality of customer service we receive. Having well supported mobile communications is critical to our business as we have numerous delivery vehicles, fitters, sales staff, project managers, directors, traveling across the UK.

We also want to see if we can boost our reception in Bromham, as although porting to O2 has improved things, we have a few 'dead spots' where the signal level drops. I will be talking with Richard in the future with regard to managing and providing our fixed line telephony. As our business grows, and we open more showrooms we'll add more users, and 3G connectivity on laptops is likely to be more widespread, particularly for project & installation managers who previously used a Bluetooth adaptor to dial out through their mobile handset if they needed email whilst on site. **cm**

