

Obsidian helps UNISON to reduce landline to mobile call costs by more than 50%

“It’s an easy money-saving solution. You start saving immediately, as soon as it is implemented - and because there is no initial outlay, you’re not waiting for a break even point. There is no downside at all, and we have found Obsidian to be a first class organisation.”

**Laurence Arterton - Infrastructure and Telecoms Manager,
UNISON**

UNISON is Britain and Europe’s biggest public sector union, with more than 1.3 million members and around 1,200 staff across the UK. Their membership predominantly consists of people working in the public services, for private contractors providing public services, and for people working in the essential utilities. Members include frontline staff and managers who work full or part time in local authorities; the NHS; the police service; colleges and schools; the electricity, gas and water industries; transport and the voluntary sector. Last year UNISON recruited 137,000 new members, an average of 375 per day.

The challenge

With a responsibility to so many members, the ability to communicate efficiently and cost effectively is a key requirement for UNISON’s staff, as Infrastructure and Telecoms Manager Laurence Arterton explains:

“Cost saving is of course a big thing in the current economic climate - but even without the recession, we have a responsibility to make sure that we maximise our budgets and do the best for our staff and members with the available funds that we have. Managing telecoms costs is a key aspect of that and we’re always looking for ways to improve, using new technology.”

Key features

- ▣ Initial predicted savings of £26,000
- ▣ Fully-managed solution with no initial outlay
- ▣ A 50%+ reduction in landline to mobile call costs
- ▣ Total savings of more than £60,000 to date
- ▣ Ongoing relationship over five years

In 2004, UNISON was working with a telecoms consultant as part of this process. The consultant recommended that Laurence should speak to Obsidian about their GSM Gateway solution, which provides the ability to save significant amounts of money on calls which are made from landline phones to mobile phones. On average, a call to a mobile from a landline is at least twice and sometimes three times as expensive as calling another mobile, so if this cost could be reduced, then UNISON would be able to save significant amounts of money. Laurence continues:

“We arranged a meeting with Obsidian to discuss the GSM Gateway solution and it was very easy to see the potential savings. The benefits were such that we had to take it forward and so we made the decision to proceed, especially as there was no up-front cost to us at all.”

The solution

Obsidian carried out a full site survey to determine the best solution and the best tariff for UNISON's needs, and then installed an 8 port GSM Gateway at their head office in London, with sufficient SIM cards to support 15,000 landline to mobile minutes per month. The initial contract was for 24 months, commencing in October 2004, and a projected saving of £25,920 over the term of the contract was identified.

During the subsequent five years, this contract has been renewed four times, with Obsidian adjusting the number of minutes and SIM cards each time to ensure that UNISON always gains the best possible savings. The solution ensures that all landline to mobile calls made by its 350 head office staff are routed via the GSM Gateway - effectively turning expensive landline to mobile calls into cheaper 'mobile to mobile' calls - and since initial installation, these savings have amounted to more than £60,000 in total.

As Laurence points out, because the solution is provided on a managed service basis, there was no up-front capital investment at all, yet immediate cost savings are generated.

"It's an easy money-saving solution", he confirms. "You start saving immediately, as soon as you implement it - and because there is no initial outlay, you're not waiting for a break even point before you start seeing a return on the investment. The hardware, and all the installation, maintenance and support is provided by Obsidian at no cost and we just pay the mobile network operator for the minutes.

Over the years Obsidian have adjusted the number of SIM cards and minutes to get us as close to 100% utilisation as possible, and we average around 90 to 95%. Obsidian always advise us on the best options to ensure we save the most money, and they provide detailed reports so that we can see exactly what we've used and exactly how much we've saved."

The future

UNISON will be moving offices to brand new purpose-built premises in early 2010. After the move, Obsidian will continue to monitor and manage the solution, as well as advising UNISON on other technology options which will enable them to maximise their available budgets even further in the future, as Laurence concludes:

"I find it really encouraging that Obsidian proactively bring new ideas and suggestions to the table to help us reduce costs and provide an even better service for our staff. They recently suggested that we might be able to route landline to mobile traffic from our branches via the Gateway as well, and this is something that we are now looking into.

Previously they also helped us with an extensive roll-out of 700 Blackberry® devices and 650 data cards for laptops as part of a major technology refresh. They used their industry knowledge to get us the best tariff available at the time, and then looked after the ordering, did all the installations, visited our offices and carried out one to one user training where necessary. Without Obsidian the project would not have been anything like as successful as it was.

The support from their helpdesk is also very fast and has really proved its worth. We recently had an issue where some calls were not being routed through the Gateway as they should have been. The helpdesk team identified the problem before we were even aware of it, spoke directly to BT and had it all resolved by the end of the day. I didn't have to do a thing! I'd definitely recommend this solution - there is no downside at all, and we have found Obsidian to be a first class organisation."

**If you would like to find out more,
or to arrange a free site survey,
please call 0203 023 7999,
email info@obsidiantelecoms.com
or visit www.obsidiantelecoms.com**