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Phillip Jones, Managing Director, Interchange Group

BlackBerry Case Study

BlackBerry Enterprise Solution and Interchange Group
IT Services

IT firm transforms its operations and customers' business with BlackBerry®

Streamlines processes and improved productivity while improving work/life balance

Background

The Interchange Group is a UK-based IT company that specialises in helping customers increase business efficiency and control costs through the use of mobile and wireless technologies.

Although Interchange has been in the technology business since 1976, Phillip Jones, the Managing Director, prefers to describe the company as business efficiency specialists. "There's one thing we've always understood it's that our customers are physically separated from their customers and their support teams. The distance between these three players can create inefficiencies that cost both time and money. We're very good at erasing the effects of this physical separation."

Interchange's decades of experience in mobile and wireless solutions makes it a unique player in the marketplace. "I can remember when 'mobile' meant using a pager and a call box," says Jones. "Over the years we've become very good at judging the intrinsic value-add of any new technology that comes along—an expertise our customers value highly."

Challenge

By the late 1990s, mobile communications technologies had made significant strides in terms of processing power and network speeds, which helped to bring them into the mainstream. One technology in particular had caught Interchange's attention: BlackBerry. The company's love affair with BlackBerry goes back to 2000, when it was first released in the UK. "It was the first mobile device to get everything right – push email, security, the user interface, the back end software," says Jones.

As a result Interchange made BlackBerry the cornerstone of several solutions it was offering to its customers. Quite rapidly it became apparent to Interchange that BlackBerry was much more than just another technology – the management team began to see it as the perfect answer to an internal challenge.

Over the years Interchange had grown and expanded, absorbing other companies it had acquired. The ongoing maintenance and staffing of a variety of facilities around the country struck Jones, as very inefficient.

The vast majority of the inefficiencies that Jones spotted were tied to business processes and work habits that were no longer adapted to mobile professionals. By default many processes required the physical presence of all the parties involved – not only was this time consuming it was also expensive in terms of mileage costs.

The very concept of a physical office was becoming increasingly obsolete in the eyes of Jones. Team members based out of the same office spent a lot of time on the road, which resulted in a communications deficit. When they did find themselves in the office they used much of the time catching up on work.

"When I looked around the company I kept coming to the same conclusion: we should be taking our own medicine." In other words, since BlackBerry was so good at improving productivity and efficiency, why didn't Interchange use it as the foundation for its very own business transformation?

Jones judged that the time was right. "Before the arrival of BlackBerry we couldn't have done it," he says. "BlackBerry was much more than just the right technology at the right time – it enabled us to create an entirely new company culture."



The Solution

The transformation began four years ago. When Interchange decided to close one of its main offices – approximately 45% of its workforce – it gave the staff the choice of either relocating to one of the other 2 main offices or working from home with a PC, broadband internet access and a BlackBerry device. Almost everyone chose to work remotely, and many did so because of BlackBerry. "It allayed their fears about being cut off from their team members or being glued to their computers all day," says Jones. "Now, they're free to organise their day and their work the way they want; and I'm comfortable knowing that they are in permanent contact with colleagues and customers."

Two years later, when Interchange was sure that the first wave had a positive impact on business by increasing productivity and communications, decided to close the other 2 main offices. Interchange simply retained a data centre and warehouse facility in Newport Pagnell.

Having seen the benefits in action for their colleagues, the remaining staff were eager to move to the BlackBerry-based solution. Today 95% of Interchange's staff works from home, with the exception of a small team in Newport Pagnell.

Everyone at Interchange, has a BlackBerry device, ranging from the latest BlackBerry 8700 Series all the way back to some of the earlier models. The devices are connected to BlackBerry Enterprise Server™ for Exchange and BlackBerry Mobile Data Services.

"We are tapping all the potential of BlackBerry," says David Burrows, Director of R&D at Interchange. The company has migrated from its existing web-based group calendar system to Microsoft Exchange Server in order to take advantage of the push email and live calendar access on BlackBerry. Interchange is in the process of migrating its entire collection of business applications to the BlackBerry. "While BlackBerry is famous for push email, many people don't realise just how good BlackBerry is at pushing data to applications," says Burrows. "And the security is incredibly strong. It's exactly what we need for a company of our size."

Interchange users have access to the company's document management system via the BlackBerry web browser. The company has also developed and deployed versions of its field services system, sales lead recording system and time tracking application for the BlackBerry. The company is currently working on developing a new knowledge management system specifically for the BlackBerry that will provide wireless access to both documents and databases.

The Advantages

Enthusiasm for BlackBerry runs deep at the Interchange Group. "90% of my workforce are mobile and don't even use their laptops anymore when travelling. Why would they, now that email and business processes are fully available from their BlackBerry devices?" says Jones.

According to Jones, BlackBerry has enabled him to rethink how the company operates. Take, for example, authorisations. In the days before BlackBerry, Jones had to take time out of his busy schedule to stop by the office to sign cheques and business proposals. "This was a waste of time and it slowed our responsiveness. So we developed a secure request-and-reply protocol that allows me to authorise transactions by email from my BlackBerry device," explains Jones. "Any company can transform the way it does business using BlackBerry – and what's more the transformation can be surprisingly straightforward."

The arrival of BlackBerry also heralded a radical shift in company culture. According to Jones, colleagues communicate better now than they did when they worked in the same building. By communicating using BlackBerry everyone has realised significant improvements in productivity and efficiency. "Meetings that lasted four hours now last one hour. All the preparation is done ahead of time via BlackBerry," says Jones.

Users were quick to adopt BlackBerry and describes it as the perfect "pick up and go" solution, ideal for non-IT people. "What's brilliant about a BlackBerry device is that with zero training anyone can use it, explains Jones. "many of our staff are the kind of people who would never have gone out and bought a PDA for personal use – but they all love BlackBerry not one of them would choose to be without BlackBerry today."

Users have also noticed a significant improvement in their quality of life, according to Jones. "Before BlackBerry staff spent long hours working, but not all of those hours were very productive. They would often have to swing by the office to check email or log onto systems, which made their days longer. Today thanks to BlackBerry, people feel their lifestyles have improved, and in tandem so has their productivity."

Perhaps most importantly, the business has continued to prosper and customers are satisfied. "I haven't received a single complaint from a customer in the past three years, since we went 100% mobile with BlackBerry," says Jones. "We're now a testbed for what we preach," he adds. Interchange's transformation has made the company leaner and more competitive.

"To me BlackBerry is the best business tool that I've been issued with since I was given my first company car. Today I'd give up my car before my BlackBerry," concludes Jones.

"What's brilliant about a BlackBerry® device is that with zero training anyone can use it. Our administrative and marketing staff are the kind of people who would never have gone out and bought a PDA for personal use – but they all love BlackBerry. Not one of them would choose to be without BlackBerry today."

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David Burrows, Director of R&D, Interchange Group

About BlackBerry

BlackBerry is an end-to-end solution developed by Research In Motion® Limited.

Founded in 1984, Research In Motion is a world leader in the wireless communications market.

For more information

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