

Providing patients with

RESPONSIVE

healthcare

Success Story **Western Elms Surgery**

Business Challenge:

To improve the patient experience while increasing the productivity of practice staff.

Technical Challenge:

To provide a reliable, cost-effective, flexible and simple-to-manage telephone system.

Based in Reading, UK, Western Elms Surgery is a busy National Health Service (NHS) general practice. Its 30 staff, including seven partners, serve 13,500 patients. Efficient telephone communication with patients is an essential part of its day-to-day operation.

Replacing an 'end of life' system

Scott Trathen, Practice Manager at Western Elms, was concerned that his organisation's telephone system and telephone answering procedures were inefficient. The practice's ageing system could not expand to meet the needs of the surgery and replacement parts were also becoming more difficult to source.

The system had no direct inward dialling facility, so front-desk staff had to handle all incoming calls. Trathen wanted to overhaul the surgery's system and relieve the unwelcome burden on reception staff. He began to look for a replacement.

Trathen viewed a demonstration of Nortel Networks Business Communications Manager (BCM), an advanced IP-based telephone system for small to medium-sized organisations. He was so impressed that he immediately recommended it to the practice partners who authorised the purchase. Western Elms disposed of its 'end of life' system and installed the BCM solution; switchover from the old system to the new BCM was completely seamless.

“With BCM, all callers get through first time. They may have to wait for a few seconds, but their call will always be answered. If they don’t wish to hold, they can leave a message.”

“Phones started to ring immediately,” says Trathen. “It gave us all quite a shock, even though that’s what we expected,” he quips. “Datasharp, the Nortel Networks partner that performed the installation, was fantastic. The nature of our business meant we needed a number of special features. The BCM system could deliver everything we asked for and Datasharp was eager to configure these features for us,” he says.

Improving face-to-face contact

BCM had an immediate impact on the surgery’s daily operations. A short menu facility automatically routed appointments calls to a dedicated line, leaving reception staff to concentrate on booking in patients and managing face-to-face enquiries.

“Straightaway, the BCM system enabled us to remove two telephone answering machines used to provide out-of-hours notification,” says Trathen. “In the past, we had to remember to set one message at lunchtime, and then switch over in the evening to another. BCM handles this facility automatically, and connects callers directly to our out-of-hours service,” he adds.

Saving one day a month in doctors’ time

As the surgery can now take calls out of hours, patients can cancel appointments even when the surgery is unattended.

“In the past, callers would often be greeted by the engaged tone, leaving them with no choice but to try again later,” says Trathen. “With BCM, all callers get through first time. They may have to wait for a few seconds, but their call will always be answered. If they don’t wish to hold, they can leave a message.

“This is particularly useful for patients who simply want to cancel an appointment,” he says. “This facility alone saves the practice one whole day each month in doctors’ time because we can now re-allocate unfilled appointment slots to patients on the waiting list,” he adds.

A wealth of useful features

BCM offers the surgery many new telephone-handset features. For example, the telephone network is now linked to the waiting room audio system, enabling doctors or nurses to page the next patient from their handset.

Western Elms has configured a BCM feature key as a panic button to alert all handsets should a patient threaten or attack a member of staff in the consulting rooms. Reception staff can immediately see from their telephone display where the incident is occurring.



The Voice Call feature on every handset can create a single buzz ‘polite ringing’, so that the doctor in consultation is not disturbed by the continuous ring of a traditional telephone,” he says.

Any incoming call can also now be recorded directly into a CallPilot facility. This is useful if a member of staff receives an abusive call or one where the content might need to be discussed or validated at a later date.

Improving the timing and quality of information

For the first time, the surgery has a voicemail capability that enables staff to receive first-hand information rather than having to rely on written messages. At the same time, reception staff can now see at a glance, from their Calling Line ID display, whether a call is internal or external and respond appropriately.

The Practice Manager or a doctor can also use the in-built Do Not Disturb (DND) feature when in meetings or requiring private time. Users can see this DND status from their individual handset display. They can also see which extensions are already in use from this display, thus avoiding frustrating interruptions to existing phone conversations.

Positive feedback from patients

Scott Trathen says the acquisition of the BCM system was partly funded by an improvement grant from the local Primary Care Health Trust, whose directive is to improve patient care, while the surgery funded the remainder itself. He believes the new system is making a significant contribution to Western Elms Surgery’s adherence to the British Government’s new contract, which calls for improved patient access to care.

“Above all, we were seeking to dramatically improve the quality of the patient experience and make communication easier and more efficient for everyone concerned. The quality of service to patients calling the surgery has been vastly improved since installing BCM. We’ve received positive feedback in a number of unsolicited comment forms submitted by patients since switching to the new system.

“The Nortel Networks solution has also given us a lever to change the way we work by enabling us to direct all incoming calls to particular phones. On top of this, I would say that the cost-to-benefit ratio of the new system far exceeds that of any other solution we considered,” Scott Trathen concludes.

Solution Summary

Installing Nortel Networks Business Communications Manager (BCM) has enabled Western Elms Surgery to improve the management and performance of telephone communication with patients. This has helped the surgery to enhance the quality of its patient care and improve staff productivity and job satisfaction.

For more information about Western Elms Surgery, visit <http://www.westernelms.com>
For more information about Datasharp visit <http://www.datasharp.co.uk>



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