



*ACCENT HOUSING*

# *CASE STUDY*

Creating a communications environment that will enable innovation and growth.



# Introduction

How can housing associations create a communications environment that will enable innovation and growth?

There's been a considerable shift towards putting the customer at the heart of the service and adapting to meet residents' changing needs. This will not only improve relationships but enable significant efficiencies to be made for any housing organisation.

However, in this connected age, where residents expect more than they ever have from the services they consume, the challenge for housing associations is to re-evaluate their communications infrastructure in order to be agile and innovative.

Before we move on to look at technology infrastructure and what housing associations can do to ensure a solid foundation for future growth, let's remember what is driving the changing demands:

- Housing association customers are no different to the rest of the UK population with 82% of all UK adults using the internet daily. However, HA's are also committed to providing services for all including those digitally excluded;

- Similarly, housing association customer expectations of services via the internet and apps on their mobile phones have increased in line with their use of day-to-day consumer services such as Amazon, Uber or Just Eat.
- Whilst telephone / voice channels remain the most preferred channel - email, web chat and now, social media are fast becoming channels of communication choice.



# A look back at housing technology infrastructure

A report by Incom Business Systems details four key challenges facing the housing sector, technology infrastructure being one. For many years, housing providers have functioned using familiar and unchanging business processes and systems.

Software and business process applications have either been bought and adapted in-house or have been developed using internal resources to fit the business needs. The result has been disparate systems and applications being used independently within the organisation.



The main takeaway from this is that housing providers face considerable legacy system issues with an array of mutually exclusive systems in place. This affects productivity as there could be challenges around collaboration and integration impacting on front-line staff who will find it hard to deal with residents' enquiries effectively within the limitations of the structure.



# *We believe a flexible unified communications (UC) platform is the answer.*

***Taking into account all of these factors: the changing demands of residents, a legacy issue of disparate systems and limited collaboration within the sector, we come back to the question: “how can housing associations create a communications environment that will enable innovation and growth”?***

At Geomant we believe a flexible Unified Communication (UC) solution is the answer. A UC solution acts as the core pillar of the communications environment enabling omnichannel interaction - residents can engage with their provider via the web, phone, email, SMS, chat, fax, or even social media networks. They can also switch between channels without their journey or conversation flow being interrupted. Additional features can be added to the core UC structure over time to accommodate the changing needs of residents, therefore, supporting future growth.

The reason we've stressed the word 'flexible' here is that you'll want to -

choose a UC system that not only has the ability to connect with existing contact centre and telephony functionality; leveraging maximum value from existing investments. But you'll also want to ensure it is flexible enough to connect with other business applications like CRM or housing management systems in order to further bridge the gap between any disparate systems.

Finally, UC solutions provide a full suite of tools to enable HA's to collaborate more effectively - increasing productivity, enabling mobility and encouraging 'anywhere' communication.

Let's take a look at a real-life example of a housing association that's leading the way in preparing for future growth and setting the foundations that will allow them to keep up with customer demands and the changing environment.

# Accent Housing

*Accent has been providing high-quality social housing for rent and sale for 50 years.*

Based in Shipley, West Yorkshire, we own and manage over 21,000 homes in five geographically dispersed Regions across the UK. We have a 40-seat contact centre based in Shipley which receives around a quarter of a million telephone calls from our residents every year. For every incoming call, one outbound call is generated (on average), making a total of half million calls per annum. 80% of calls are about either repairs or rents!

In February 2018, we successfully launched our Accent Connect programme, an 'omnichannel' powerful contact centre solution (powered by Geomant) that enhances services to the customer whilst improving the working environment for staff and providing management with rich, real-time information that supports strategic decision making and good governance.

In summary, Accent Connect is one integrated communication platform that encapsulates voice, email, web chat, social media and video conferencing.



*Steve Dungwoth Director of Digital Transformation Accent Housing*

Customer interactions have SLAs and are automatically routed to Contact Advisers according to their skillset. As with many of the new breed of technology solutions, Connect is easy to administer from within the Contact Centre (e.g. changing queues, recording messages, emergency mode), rather than having to rely on help from ICT support, so making it 'agile' to manage.



# Case study continued...

Accent's traditional voice channel has been enhanced, providing the customer with the ability to request a call back rather than queuing to speak to an agent. Staff are provided with 'screen-popping', so the system automatically finds the customers CRM record before the call/email is answered. It allows the agent to consult CRM before answering the call so they are better prepared, saving time and impressing the customer that their information is immediately available at the fingertips of staff

Connect is integrated with Accent's housing management system, MIS ActiveH, and will push the content of emails and web chats into ActiveH so that all staff have a full, real-time 360-degree view of the contact with customers. Another reason staff love the system is that they now complete one task at a time rather than managing multiple calls and emails. Contact Advisers can also seamlessly allow housing, surveyors and contractors to join the customer on the call.

The management information produced by Connect is excellent and is starting to be used to allow Accent to know, understand and segment their customers better -

, as well as manage the contact centre far more responsively. Importantly, this intelligence is utilised for strategic decision making, providing the Executive Team and Board with the information required to ensure good governance.

*"All staff have a full, real-time 360-degree view of the contact with customers".*

Outgoing campaigns have been created to utilise the quieter times of Advisers to contact customers about their levels of rent arrears or whether they need help with Universal Credit. More resources have been deployed at evenings and weekends to enhance email as an equally accessible channel of communication.

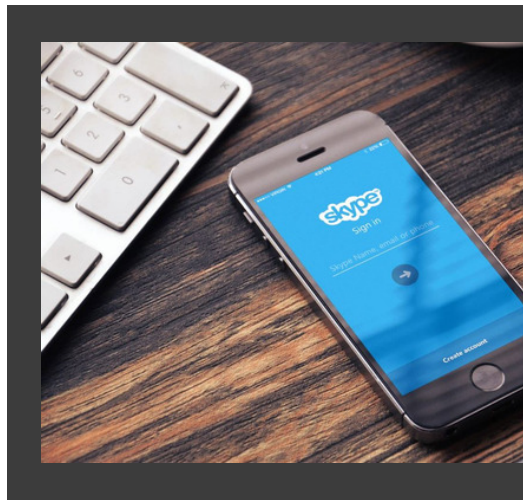
# Case study continued...

Contact Advisers are now able to resolve more customer enquiries at first point of contact by having information immediately available and by connecting customers to agents with the right specialist skill set, regardless of where they may be.

Wider benefits of the project include:

- Mobile and flexible working has been embraced. There is a less need for staff to travel to attend meetings, as 1-2-1 and group video conferencing is available and encouraged using Skype4Business.
- Accent staff share their 'presence' with all colleagues (i.e. if they are 'Out of the Office', 'Available' 'In a Meeting', 'Away', 'Offline'), so allowing staff to decide if to make contact with each other without having to actually try.
- There is an instant message facility between one or more people and the ability share and collaborate on documents.

Accent Connect has been a great success and is having a very positive impact on customer perception, staff efficiency and the working environment. The solution allows for easy integration so should we need to integrate other functions to keep up with changing demands, it can be done easily.

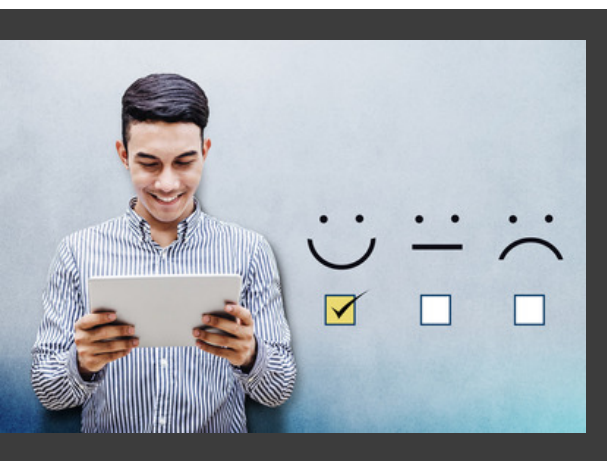


# Conclusion.

A massive opportunity exists for social housing providers to take advantage of new and innovative products to support and improve service delivery. The key takeaway from this blog is to have a core structure in place first, that will allow this to happen in the most efficient and cost-effective way.

## About Geomant

Geomant empowers organisations to deliver exceptional customer interactions by utilising our expertise, software and integration capabilities. With twenty years' experience delivering innovative contact centre and digital interaction solutions, we design and build tailored solutions for customers large and small.



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