

Emergency coordination with on-demand conferencing

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Lynne McGregor
Development Manager
Health Protection Scotland

Health Protection Scotland is using BT MeetMe to transform its response to the swine flu threat

Client

Health Protection Scotland (HPS) is an organization established by the Scottish Executive to strengthen and coordinate healthcare activities. As a division of NHS National Services Scotland (NSS), HPS works in conjunction with other agencies to help prevent the spread of infections and other hazards; and to minimize the effects if they do occur. It does this by coordinating incident management, and communicating with health professionals and the public.

Challenge

HPS has vast experience in dealing with events likely to test the health service and other emergency services in Scotland. Examples include the containment of infections such as SARS and the threat posed by avian flu in the period to 2008.

When swine flu emerged in 2009 as the latest threat to the nation's health, HPS needed to quickly establish a way to regularly collect and analyze data – from health workers all around Scotland – on the number of new or suspected cases. This information would provide essential input to decision-making and enable HPS to issue advice and guidance to maximize containment and seek to avert a pandemic.

HPS began to hold daily conference calls with health boards and government departments using a scheduled audio conferencing service. However, with the situation changing by the hour, this arrangement was unwieldy. Lynne McGregor, Development Manager at HPS, explains: “We needed to pre-book audio conference calls and pay for a set number of connections when we were unsure how many parties would call in. This was time consuming, complex to set up, and very expensive. We needed a more flexible on-demand service; and we needed it quickly.”

BT Conferencing differentiators

- Market leading fully hosted audio conferencing platform requiring no hardware or software deployment by the customer
- Cost effective pay-as-you-go service needing no capital outlay or fixed charges and featuring attractive calling rates
- The ability to react quickly to provide service to HPS within a short lead time
- The support of a BT Conferencing account team dedicated to customers in Scotland

BT Conferencing Case study

Health Protection Scotland

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Solution

Having learned about BT MeetMe at a BT Conferencing event a few weeks previously, a representative of the NSS IT department suggested it would better suit the organization's needs. As a hosted audio conferencing service, which only requires a fixed or mobile phone for access, BT MeetMe enables virtual meetings with up to 40 participants. It seemed the perfect answer. No prior booking is required and conferences can be established at the drop of a hat. The service is easy to use and available at any time, every day of the year, whenever there is a need to collaborate.

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BT MeetMe enables group conversations to take place without anybody leaving their office, so collaboration is more immediate and there is less time wasted in travelling. Used regularly it can become a key enabler for more responsive decision-making, lower costs, greater efficiency, and more sustainable business.

Each BT MeetMe account has two PIN numbers, one for the chairman – the organizer of the call – and the other for the participants. To use the service delegates simply pick up the phone, dial the access number, enter their PIN, and announce their name. Once the chairman dials in all the parties are connected together in a virtual meeting.

There is a wide range of features including the ability for the chairman to request an automated roll call to check who is on the line, or to digitally record the call for replay later. If there are any problems a BT coordinator is always on hand at the touch of a button. HPS initially requested nineteen BT MeetMe accounts, which it assigns to specific individuals in the organization on the basis of need.

Value

BT MeetMe has transformed communications for HPS. It has allowed regular daily virtual meetings to be quickly and easily scheduled – as well as ad hoc calls – simplifying and accelerating the essential processes of data collection and information exchange to help combat the swine flu threat.

Lynne McGregor observes: “The process of setting up calls has been greatly simplified. We can now respond to events much more quickly and set up a virtual meeting almost instantly, even in the middle of the night if necessary, without needing to make a prior reservation.

It is also much better for participants in our daily scheduled meeting. They know the number is always the same so they don't have to waste time waiting for emails or calls to tell them what the latest dial in details are – it's saving our stakeholders time too.”

There are other operational benefits as well. For example, the record and replay function has proved particularly useful for HPS to improve governance and accountability for actions taken and to assist with the accurate transcription of virtual meeting notes. “There is no doubt that BT MeetMe had an instant impact, particularly in time and cost saved, and, most importantly at this time, flexibility,” says Lynne McGregor.

From a standing start the HPS has quickly become the largest single user of BT MeetMe services in Scotland. In one month, at the height of the swine flu containment phase, the organization made calls totalling over 28,000 minutes, involving almost 500 people. Yet despite this high usage HPS is set to see an estimated 60 percent saving in its audioconferencing spend.

HPS is now adopting BT MeetMe as business as usual and not just something for emergency or exceptional use. As a consequence it is planning to extend the service so that many more of its 170 people have their own BT MeetMe accounts.

Lynne McGregor concludes: “NSS always seeks to improve itself and we have also developed a strong environmental policy. BT MeetMe fits well with those aims – transforming the way we work, improving collaboration, reducing travel, and raising efficiency.”

Core BT Conferencing services

- BT MeetMe

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