



A seamless, continuous communication flow at Affinity Water

Affinity Water is the largest water-only supplier in the UK. The company, which employs over 1,400 people, provides on average 900 million litres of water each day to a population of more than 3.6 million people in parts of Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Surrey, the London Boroughs of Harrow and Hillingdon and parts of the London Boroughs of Barnet, Brent, Ealing and Enfield. Affinity Water also supplies water to the Tendring peninsula in Essex and the Folkestone and Dover areas of Kent.

Affinity Water's operation is underpinned by its IT operation, which delivers a full range of IT services to its 1,400 employees. Previously completely outsourced, in 2015 the company initiated a bold move to bring all IT services and projects back into Affinity Water to kick-start its 'digital-first' strategy.

Ben Wilson, IT services manager at Affinity Water, explains: "We wanted to make a strategic move towards transforming the IT services function. This encompassed a variety of elements, including the development of new applications, accelerating our use of the cloud and re-imagining the experience we created for our internal customers."

By 2015, 90 people had joined Affinity Water's IT department, covering the whole operation: architecture, service desk, SM, infrastructure, security, projects and programme management. Yet, the radical move presented notable challenges.

Ben explains: "We were essentially starting from scratch so we saw this as an enormous opportunity to vastly improve the systems to record assets and call logging information."

Taking back control

Using ServiceNow out of the box, Affinity Water launched a quick-start package for incident, problem and change management in April 2015 and within six months had transferred all responsibility from the incumbent outsourcer.



Highlights

The UK's largest water-only supplier keeps 900 million litres of water flowing every day with ServiceNow

Headquarters

Hatfield, UK

Geographies

UK

Employees

1,400

Business

Utilities

Partner

Engage ESM

Challenges

- Insourcing the IT function required a service desk to manage all incident, problem and change processes and to build from the ground up within one month
- Regulatory split of the business into two separate entities left the wholesale operation running its service desk on email
- Exposure to regulatory fines, due to dated communication process for water supply interruptions.

Solution

- IT service management
- Change management
- Customer service management
- Custom applications

Ben comments: "Building our in-house operation from scratch looked to be a massive undertaking. We had a new team and we didn't have the luxury of time, yet it was an exciting project. ServiceNow enabled us to develop workflows and incident scenarios whilst still being able to meet the day to day challenges of the business, taking an agile approach to service management development."

Phase two launched in 2017, focused on request fulfilment through the launch of a new service portal, which Ben says "truly opened out the new interface between IT and the internal customer."

According to Ben, his team "went hell for leather" to bring the portal to life, creating 60-70 items in the self-service portal to enable every employee to request anything from kit bundles and hardware to software applications and access rights. Every piece of information required by the IT service desk to action the request is captured in the portal, ensuring a fast resolution.

A focus on the user experience was essential, as Ben explains: "Rather than designing the portal for IT, we focused on creating a customer-focused service, with simple workflows – a business portal to consume anything that is IT-related."

Within four weeks, approximately 40% of requests had already naturally shifted to the self-service portal, at which time Ben took the decision to simply turn off email requests. Today, 85% of requests come through the portal, which means around 20,000 requests per year have been moved off email into the service portal.

A catalyst for change following market reform

In April 2017, significant market reform from industry regulator Ofwat brought a new opportunity to use the ServiceNow platform, as it led Affinity Water having to split its wholesale and retail operations and run them as completely separate businesses.

As Ben explains, this brought significant challenges for the wholesale team: "Our wholesale team had to work with several new retail customers and needed a more efficient way to record their interactions. They needed a system which was able to provide visibility of queues, who was calling in and the status of requests or problems."

Affinity Water's wholesale department approached Ben and his team to find out more on how IT could improve their service to retail customers. Ben's team worked closely with wholesale to deploy ServiceNow Customer Service Management (CSM) to deliver a seamless experience to its retail customers. Information on every single Supply Point ID – which identifies the meter that supplies each address – can be accessed on ServiceNow. This allowed the wholesale team to identify exactly which supply point the retailer is calling about and fast track a resolution.

Ben added: "Our wholesale team have used this system to its full advantage. They are now pushing for the top spot on wholesale service delivery in the water industry and our IT department is delighted to have had the opportunity to help them achieve this."

Results

- Fast request fulfilment, with 20,000 requests now processed through the self-service portal
- Brand reputation and SLAs maintained during major industry reform, with an entirely new call logging system for the wholesale service desk set up to manage 4,000 requests from retailers per year
- A reduction in the risk of potentially large fines from UK water regulator, Ofwat for failing to comply with supply interruption targets through improved visibility, control and communication of the restoration process.

Putting the plan into unplanned disruption

ServiceNow has also extended into Affinity Water's Situational Awareness programme, forming the platform for a control hub to handle the communication and information flow for every planned and unplanned interruption – branded the Customer Impact Tool, or CIT.

Ben commented: "Incidents can happen at any time across our water network, through pipe failure or external damage. Either way, we have a duty to restore water within 12 hours. We are regulated on this and failure to comply can mean fines and rebates to customers that can be a significant cost to the business."

All communication has moved off email and into ServiceNow, where automated workflows mean alerts and information on what has happened, why it's happened and what's being actioned are sent to the right people at the right time.

Manual monitoring has been replaced with dashboards that display countdown clocks and the status of all disruptions so that informed decisions can be taken on where to apply resource and remediation, with confidence.

Ben added: "We are dealing with complicated scenarios and a ticking clock for resolving any interruption.

"Now, every executive, incident handler, customer service representative and field engineer can view the dashboard and, with the right permissions in place, update jobs in real-time. The tracking available through managing the job all in one place also makes auditing straight forward for our regulation teams."

Adding value through agility

The agile approach that ServiceNow supports is enabling the IT team to deliver value fast across the Affinity Water business, creating new features, applications and instances on one platform. New projects are already being discussed with Facilities and HR, while IT is exploring automation and machine learning and is already primed for a Customer Impact Tool part two.

Ben said: "It's easy to come up with an idea, but usually very hard to make that happen. You need to plan, build, buy and test. ServiceNow has agility built in. We can get our ideas to market before others have even finished scoping them – and that's incredibly exciting."

"ServiceNow is a significant 'win' for Affinity Water. People across the business are experiencing first-hand what IT has achieved and we're doing some genuinely awesome work with the platform."

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– Ben Wilson, IT services manager,
Affinity Water

