

Case Study: Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA)

If you've ever faced an emergency, whether fire, accident, medical or crime related, chances are you've depended on the assistance of an emergency services operator. In the state of Victoria, when a member of the public makes an emergency call, they are answered in their moment of need by the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA). More than 1.8 million calls are answered by ESTA each year, or a call every 17 seconds on average. Dealing with that 24/7 bombardment not only requires well designed systems but also a team of exceptional, trained people across a range of disciplines.

For Michael Jones, Project Manager with ESTA, making sure services are constantly improved without interruption is more than just mission critical. His team plays a vital role in making sure Victorians receive the very best help in sometimes life-and-death situations. From the telephone operators on the front line to the support staff behind the scenes, everyone at ESTA is ultimately focused on the ESTA mission: "Delivering an integrated emergency and public safety communications solution with accuracy, speed and empathy, in partnership with our stakeholders."

To ensure the best service to staff and public, ESTA had a number of pressing technology considerations, including upgrading to supportable office tools. In October 2010, a business case was made to upgrade from Microsoft Windows XP and Office 2003 to Windows 7 and Office 2010, standardising on a single environment. This meant a project involving more than 300 users, with a variety of skill levels, spread across five locations in Melbourne and Ballarat. While this software is not used in the 000 call process itself, it was essential to avoid unnecessary disruption to the people supporting that service delivery. For this reason, purchasing and installing the software was only a part of the story.

"The user experience and training was a critical part of the business case for the licencing upgrade. I have seen attempts to undertake projects without fully addressing the user impact and in the end you can't avoid it. It is an essential part of the job and if you ignore that you end up paying more, not just in financial terms but in user productivity," says Jones.

"Going from Office 03 to Office 2010 is a fairly big jump in terms of the tools. We needed to plug the gaps between the two technologies." It would, says Jones, be wrong to assume that the more advanced users will find the transition easier." The higher level users are more demanding in many cases as they use a lot more of the advanced Office functions, so they certainly need support and cannot be overlooked."

Michael Jones looked at a number of proposals to provide user training for the migration. "The Data#3 proposition was well thought-out. The main difference was that it was tailored to suit the culture of our organisation and what we are trying to achieve, rather than trying to make us fit to a pre-defined solution." Solid practical experience of similar projects was another factor that was highly regarded by Jones.

Data#3

Paul Woods, Data#3's Business Productivity Services lead said "The reason Data#3 invested in the Business Productivity Team was to ensure our customers got as much value as possible from the technology they purchase. Working closely with ESTA we were able to remove the risk of failure through lack of user adoption from the project, allowing the team to focus on a sound technical solution without the pressure of a frustrated and undertrained user base."

"One objective of the training project was a positive end-user experience. It doesn't break the bank to do that and there are considerable business benefits as a result," commented Michael Jones.

Data#3 conducted an extensive training needs analysis and aligned activity to ESTA's software deployment. The help desk workers were closely involved, helping them to prepare to support users facing a change to the desktop environment. Users attended an intensive hands-on training lab session in the afternoon before the software was deployed overnight. This session concentrated on what the users needed to know to be productive on day one, with ongoing training to build on those initial skills.

"If we don't ensure smooth user transition from one platform to the next, we would certainly see a productivity decrease," said Jones. In the ESTA environment, disruption is not an option.

Data#3 had a 'floor-walker' on site to visit every single user on the first morning to

ensure there were no roadblocks impacting productivity. A resource was on-site for some five weeks, becoming the face of the project and ensuring users always had immediate help available should they need it. Once this first hurdle was overcome, a more advanced training was provided for users, bringing about additional efficiencies. From the front line managers in Ballarat that can now schedule their rosters better in Excel, to the Technical Writer who now has a better grasp of Word, to the CFO and Financial Accountant who can now prepare their reports faster, people are equipped to extract maximum advantage from the new software.

"We received consistently good feedback from the users about the training. The quality of the people was outstanding, they got on and did the job and they were very professional. Data#3 even provided collateral that was put on our intranet for users as an extra tool. Data#3 has been very easy to work with, nothing has been too much trouble," said Jones.

Aside from the normal measures, such as concluding on time and within budget, Michael Jones had another method of gauging the success of the implementation. Just as for his colleagues handling the 000 calls, a low call volume can only be a good thing. "One of our measures is calls to our help desk and there weren't a lot of them, the day passed relatively quietly, meaning none of our users were in crisis."