

“Citrix and Fujitsu have helped us deliver a project very much aligned to Centrica’s core values: to be agile, collaborative and courageous.”

Patrick Babic
Technical Solutions Service Owner
Centrica

Co-creating an agile, global, virtual desktop environment

At a glance

Country: United Kingdom

Industry: Utilities

Founded: 1812

Website: centrica.com

Challenge

Centrica’s existing virtual desktop solution was running on physical servers and struggled to cope with spikes in demand, particularly in its contact centres, during seasonal weather incidents. It wanted to migrate its desktop to the cloud for a more responsive and scalable platform.

Solution

Centrica, Fujitsu and Citrix used agile methodology to deploy a Global Virtual Workspace platform, which was available to early users in just three months and complete within five months. The seamless migration of 10,000 users then followed, with up to 18,000 users supported globally.

Benefit

- Pay-as-you-go model eliminates the need for frequent upfront IT investment
- Solution scales seamlessly to meet seasonal peaks for between 15,000 and 18,000 users
- Familiar interface cuts training costs and improves user satisfaction
- Flexible payment models enable market agility
- 350 RPA bots perform 2m transactions per year, boosting productivity and reducing costs

Customer

Centrica's history reaches back over 200 years, when it was originally founded as the Gas Light and Coke Company. Today, it has 29,500 global employees, including 10,000 engineers and technicians, supplying energy and services to over 23 million customers in the UK, Ireland and North America through its brands, which include British Gas, Direct Energy and Bord Gáis Energy.

Products and Services

■ FUJITSU Systems Integration

Managing seasonal demand

A savage winter weather front, known as 'the Beast from the East', wreaked havoc in the UK in 2018. As one of the country's leading energy suppliers, Centrica faced unprecedented call volumes, which its customer contact centres – despite exceptional efforts – struggled to handle efficiently. The company was using a virtual desktop solution running on physical servers in its data centres, which functioned well under normal conditions but couldn't scale quickly and cost effectively, making it difficult to flex capacity in line with seasonal demands.

After the completion of Centrica's digital transformation to Windows 10 and Microsoft Office 365, and the introduction of the evergreen field engineer service, the drive to co-create and innovate a collaborative idea of moving the virtual desktop to the cloud was born which would enable the business to standardise across countries and deliver greater flexibility to users. Centrica's trusted technology advisor and award-winning Citrix Service Provider, Fujitsu, then worked with Centrica to identify a new versatile cloud-based solution, removing the need for significant upfront investment and enabling additional capacity to be added almost instantly.

"The need for flexibility and scalability was a big driver for change," explains Patrick Babic, Technical Solutions Service Owner, Centrica. "Whenever we had to expand the previous platform, it took four months to go through the paperwork, purchase and deploy the hardware. It was costly and not very agile."

Introducing agility at speed

The core Global Virtual Workspace platform was developed by Centrica, Fujitsu and Citrix, using agile methodology. Taking this agile and cutting-edge approach comes with risks; as a service provider to 23 million global customers, it was vital to remain operational throughout the project to serve its customers. The project therefore had a small pilot group to test and validate the approaches, especially when design changes were being made. This ensured minimal disruption for users while the project was carried out and the platform was being designed and built.

This collaborative approach resulted in the new platform being available for early users in just three months and for the platform to be complete within five months. Seamless migration of 10,000 users then happened in the following two months, with the solution supporting contact centre locations around the world by collating and simplifying 1,200 different applications into one single desktop. For other users, such as energy traders, where their trading software did not support a move to the cloud, the team designed an on-premise desktop, hosted in a private data centre.



"We started at the end of November 2018 and both platforms were fully ready, end to end, by April 2019," adds Babic. "In just five months, we delivered two separate Citrix platforms, both connected to Citrix Cloud services."

The success of this led to the acceleration of the use of the service by teams in Denmark and Singapore, and then the evolution of the platform and service to support users of the Bord Gáis Energy brand in parallel. The project is now in its final phase with the expansion to an additional 5,000 Direct Energy users in North America.

A scalable, familiar and cost-effective user platform

The Global Virtual Workspace co-created by Centrica, Fujitsu and Citrix provides a new modernised platform, enabling Centrica's teams across the UK and Ireland to better serve customers and resolve any issues they have. Upon completion in North America, it will see up to 18,000 users supported globally, all on one cohesive platform – at neutral cost. It also includes 350 RPA bots, which perform two million transactions per year, boosting productivity and reducing costs.

The platform has delivered benefits for Centrica and its workforce due to their familiarity with the interface. Centrica has saved significant time and costs of training users and employees to use the new solution, as it is a desktop platform with which they are already comfortable.

Moreover, it provides a virtualised Windows 10 desktop in the cloud that's highly scalable, always up-to-date and available on any device. This enables Centrica to quickly deploy modern and legacy desktop apps to the cloud, and flexibly scale up and down the system in minutes instead of months.

At the same time, the unified management in the Azure portal enables Centrica to support 15,000-18,000 users at any time when the organisation needs to support a higher influx of customer calls such as during severe weather conditions and temperatures. Centrica is also seeing efficiency savings in IT management, having previously operated 44 management servers, the business now only has a simple, single interface.

"With this project, we took a bold decision to simplify and standardise the desktop so that our users, employees and the business can continue to benefit from greater productivity and functionality into the future," concludes Babic. "Citrix and Fujitsu have helped us deliver a project very much aligned to Centrica's core values: to be agile, collaborative and courageous."

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Email: AskFujitsu@uk.fujitsu.com

Tel: +44 (0)1235 797711

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