

Centrica's global desktop delivers agility and sustainability

Scalability, sustainability and access to talent with Citrix

Flexibility and scalability a driver for change

Centrica plc is an international energy services and solutions company serving 26 million customers in the UK, Ireland and North America. The business has 30,000 employees in locations all around the world, ranging from customer contact centers to energy traders working in the financial markets.

The business used a virtual desktop solution running on physical servers in its datacenters. The solution functioned well though was difficult to scale at speed or cost-effectively.

"The need for flexibility and scalability was a big driver for change. Whenever we had to expand the platform, it took four months to go through the paperwork, purchase and deploy the hardware. It was costly and not very agile," explains Patrick Babic, Service Owner for Centrica's End User Computing (EUC) team. This made it impossible to flex capacity in line with business seasonality, such as the greater demand on contact centers during the UK's winter period.

As the server hardware was approaching end of life, the team, along with Centrica's EUC service partner Fujitsu, saw an opportunity for a new approach. Centrica has a cloud-first strategy and moving the virtual desktop to cloud would allow the business to simplify and standardize its desktop whilst also bringing greater flexibility, cost savings and carbon reductions.

Centrica worked with Fujitsu (Citrix Worldwide Partner of the Year 2020) and Citrix to develop a new solution using Citrix Cloud Services and Citrix ADC.

A secure, flexible desktop in just five months

The Centrica team rejected a simple "lift and shift" approach to creating a cloud-based desktop. Instead, it developed a completely new, standardized desktop, dramatically simplifying the older desktop solution. In fact, the agile, cross-functional team of Centrica, Fujitsu and Citrix designed two desktop solutions – from design to deployment in just five months – that could be rolled out to 18,000 users around the world. For standard users, the team built a single desktop, collating and simplifying 1,200 different applications.

centrica

Industry

Utilities

Location

Dublin, Ireland

Citrix products

- Citrix ADC
- Citrix Cloud Services

Key Benefits

- Citrix Cloud Services delivers a secure, scalable and energy efficient desktop for 18,000 users
- Citrix ADC provides secure, remote access to corporate resources from any device, anywhere
- Secures business continuity plans, allowing employees to work from anywhere in strict observance of security requirements that are specific to the industry

For energy traders, where their trading software did not support a move to cloud, the team designed an on-premise desktop located in the private datacenter used by traders.

Using Microsoft's Windows Virtual Desktop (WVD) with Citrix Cloud Services means that staff have the same, familiar desktop experience regardless of the underlying technology. It also streamlines IT management processes like patching, app testing and delivery. Using WVD with Citrix also optimizes the Microsoft Teams experience, a key collaboration tool for Centrica. Ultimately, as Darren Miles, Centrica's Vice President of Enterprise Services, says, "The benefit is the user experience. Having the same look and feel means we can more easily move people between technology platforms if we need to. It gives our frontline staff a common experience, which means we can better serve our customers."

Citrix ADC brings added flexibility, as James Boswell, Centrica's Global Director of End User Computing, explains, "Citrix ADC allows our workforce to use any device, connect into the corporate network and use corporate applications. It enables our employees to work remotely on any device and be both agile and secure."

Miles adds, "With Citrix, we implement a robust set of controls, globally. We have the certainty of a common set of controls, messaging, and ways of working. Citrix enables us to serve our customers in a secure and consistent way."

By early 2020, the solution was fully rolled-out in Europe and supporting contact centers. Plans were underway to deploy the desktop to Centrica's North American locations when the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

"We had people at home, taking customer calls in just a few hours"

When the UK government announced its lockdown policy, Centrica was able to move quickly to maintain service to its customers.

"Using the Citrix platform, Microsoft Teams and working in an agile fashion, we were able to respond very quickly," says Boswell. "Azure and Citrix Cloud Services meant we could go rapidly from 2,000 users a day on the new platform to 14,000, taking tens of thousands of customer calls. We had whole contact centers working from home, almost immediately. As we added more people, the platform just auto-scaled to handle the additional workload."

Many of Centrica's contact center agents used their personal devices to securely access their Centrica desktop from home. For those without access to a device at home, new laptops were procured and built by a joint Fujitsu and Centrica team in record time.

"Because we could very quickly and securely enable people to use their own devices, we had people at home, taking customer calls in just a few hours," Miles says. "Citrix gave us the agility and scalability to meet our customers' needs, and the ability to respond at the pace we did, to serve our most vulnerable customers."

"When you see our agents on the TV ads, working from a laptop in their kitchens, that shows you how proud the company is of the capability we delivered," Miles continues. "We couldn't have done that without the Citrix platform."

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Darren Miles
VP of Enterprise Services
Centrica plc

Enabling a different pool of talent and life experience

As Boswell says, “The COVID-19 situation accelerated our future plans.”

“It’s all about flexibility,” Miles explains. “We’re asking our colleagues to work in different ways and the platform provides the agility and flexibility to give them a bit more freedom and empowerment. We can provide a different way of working which takes some of the stress out of life. It also reduces travel which helps with the environment. In return, we’re seeing that reflected in higher levels of engagement.”

The ability to work flexibly from home brings future advantages, too

“It means we can access a different pool of talent and life experience,” Miles continues. “For example, people who are at home doing school runs or caring often can’t manage a 9 to 5 office job as well. But they have a different and valuable life experience. At Centrica, we want to be problem solvers, so that different set of skills, talent and experience is valuable to us. When we enable people to work from home, for hours that fit with their needs, we can tap more easily into those skills.”

Supporting Centrica’s sustainability goals

As a major energy services business, Centrica is committed to protecting the planet and has set itself an ambitious target to become carbon neutral by 2050. Its Citrix desktop, and the changes that have been accelerated through the coronavirus pandemic, support this, as Boswell explains:

“There are a number of factors. Because the cloud auto-scales, we don’t have a large infrastructure footprint running 24/7 in a dedicated datacenter. That means we save on compute power and, therefore, on electrical power. Also, as we’ve seen, it makes our workforce more flexible than ever before. That means fewer cars on the road and, potentially, fewer offices in the future. That really helps us reduce our energy consumption and commuting-related emissions.”

There are other benefits, too

“As we move more to video than business travel, we save time, energy and personal inconvenience,” he continues. “Using lower-spec, low-energy devices like Google Chromebooks or thin clients reduces energy consumption for end-point devices. It also means we can extend the lifecycle of older, end-user hardware like desktop and laptop PCs.”

Saving IT costs as well as energy

Centrica’s desktop project is already cost-neutral and the business forecasts it will see cost savings in the first full year of operation due, in part, to the new model being consumption-based.

“With our desktop on Citrix Cloud Services and Microsoft Azure, we can spin up and down per region to meet seasonal demand. We’ll also have the economies of scale that come from a global platform. Overall, we’ll be constantly flexing between 15,000 and 18,000 users,” explains Babic.

“Using Windows Virtual Desktop with Citrix Cloud Services allows us to run Microsoft Teams in a much more performant way. Before COVID-19, our contact centers didn’t really use Teams because they’re all sat in the same place, but since we’ve had the lockdown, our Teams usage has gone through the roof, our contact center agents use it all the time.”

James Boswell
Global Director of
End User Computing
Centrica plc

Centrica is already seeing efficiency savings in IT management, with fewer management servers in operation. Unexpectedly, the sudden move to empowered remote-working resulted in a decrease in calls to IT support, indicating future savings from a flexible model.

Robotics on Citrix, too

“We have a huge RPA [robotic process automation] platform running on Citrix,” adds Babic. “We have 350 bots running constantly and last year the platform processed over two million transactions which was 100% growth from a year before. That’s something which wouldn’t be possible without a scalable solution. It’s an activity that was previously done by humans, many of whom are now doing higher value work. The benefits in productivity and cost savings are huge.”

Citrix supports cutting-edge approach to innovation

“We want to be at the cutting edge of innovation,” Babic says of Centrica’s approach to IT. “There are huge advantages to being at the front. We work very closely with Citrix, Microsoft and Fujitsu so our employees get the benefits of new functionality as soon as it’s available.

“With this project,” he continues, “we took a bold decision to simplify and standardize the desktop so that our employees and the business can continue to benefit from greater productivity and functionality into the future, wherever they are, on whatever device they choose. Citrix and Fujitsu have helped us deliver a project very much aligned to Centrica’s core values: to be agile, collaborative and courageous.”

Summarizing the project, Steven Anderson, Fujitsu’s Global Client Executive for Centrica, says, “Centrica, partnering with Fujitsu and Citrix, have designed, deployed and migrated thousands of users to a global desktop at pace and, critically, with no disruption to the business, even in the most unprecedented circumstances. It has been achieved collaboratively in just a few months, something that usually takes large organizations years to complete, meaning Centrica are quickly benefiting from a single, consistent user experience and cost savings.”

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