

British Gas Housing Services Group Streamlines Business Processes for Efficient Customer Service

EXTRA! X-treme Terminal Emulation Improves User Productivity



Centrica (www.Centrica.co.uk) is an integrated global energy, home services, and telecommunications group, owning some of the best known brands in the UK today, including British Gas Housing Services Group. The company employs 30,000 people in the UK alone and sells a wide range of products and services, among them energy supply and home services in the UK, Europe, and North America.

British Gas is the leading provider of energy-related installation, breakdown, and service cover packages for over 3.5m customers. British Gas has recently been awarded a contract to manage the service and repair of 10,500 Islington Council properties managed by social housing provider Homes for Islington (HFi). All gas appliances need to be serviced and certificated annually, and tenant-reported breakdowns responded to within contractual obligation.

Time Consuming and Complex Appointment Processing

The legacy system British Gas Housing Services Group had in place to manage tenant visits was complex and time consuming. Appointments were passed from HFi to British Gas Housing Services Group electronically every 15 minutes and placed on an FTP site before being copied to a file-server for processing. This involved pasting data into an Excel spreadsheet, where a macro was embedded to transfer the content and key fields into an easily readable document. The document was subsequently printed out and the data entered manually into the British Gas Work Management Information System (WMIS), which issued details about the jobs to engineers.

After reviewing the existing process, Stuart Margerrison, the Head of British Gas' Housing Services Group, concluded that it was not providing the functionality needed for them to stay on top of burgeoning requests. British Gas Housing Services Group wanted to modernise the system so it would be significantly faster, more intuitive, and convenient to use.

QUICK VIEW

Problem

Manual processing of maintenance and service appointments was time-consuming and increasing at a rapid rate due to new contract wins. British Gas Housing Services Group wanted to modernise the system to make it easier to respond to customer needs.

Solution

EXTRA! X-treme provided:

- High levels of security for accessing valuable legacy data
- Tools for enhancing user productivity
- Seamless integrations with other technologies

Results

- Increased employee productivity.
- Reduced man hours by eliminating duplication
- Improved response times for customer appointments
- Enhanced customer and employee satisfaction

Identifying End User Needs Prior to Implementation

After careful evaluation, the British Gas Housing Services Group team appointed Attachmate to provide the technology and expertise to streamline its appointment management process. Attachmate had a proven track record of working with other departments within British Gas Housing Services Group, so the decision was straightforward, according to Rob Heis, Business Support Manager at British Gas Housing Services Group, who facilitated the project. "We already knew Attachmate could provide us with a high degree of technical understanding and appreciation of our business needs."

Attachmate shadowed and interviewed end users to achieve a clear understanding of what was expected. This guaranteed an efficient and effective deployment. Heis explained, "It was not straightforward, but the Attachmate team identified our requirements early on and were extremely responsive to our needs. As the project evolved, we realised there were other features we would like the new system to incorporate—and Attachmate took these changes in their stride."

Swift Implementation with EXTRA! X-treme Software

Attachmate® EXTRA! X-treme™ terminal emulation software was the solution, which allowed British Gas Housing Services Group to simplify its environment. Applications were produced using Visual Basic 6 and EXTRA!® Basic. The initial deployment had a tight deadline and British Gas Housing Services Group required the solution to be live in two months, a target Attachmate successfully met after comprehensive testing.

Now the files created by HFI are picked up automatically from the file server and the work request details entered automatically into WMIS. Call centre agents search for the property, and enter jobs into the WMIS through two GUI screens. EXTRA! X-treme utilises the in-built macro language and allows interaction with the VT-based WMIS system. Planners have a consistent method of job creation, as jobs entered by call centre agents aren't directly created in WMIS. Instead, a macro (WMIS-HUB) takes all jobs (XML feeds) and makes multiple checks against WMIS to ensure there are no duplicates created.

The overall solution ensures the information is received, formatted, and communicated to the engineers faster, to minimise human error and manage duplication. Previously, requests by tenants to change an appointment date of a live job, or responding to a no access card, could legitimately generate multiple job references within HFI's system. However this could lead to additional jobs being raised in the British Gas work management system—potentially creating two separate appointments, with two separate engineer visits. The new application prevented further duplications.

Management of high priority jobs expedites service to special needs individuals

High priority jobs are also managed using the EXTRA! X-treme application, with precedence given to old age pensioners (OAPs), vulnerable people, and those with young children or babies. These priority reports include reports of gas leaks, and recognition of customers who have previously lodged complaints, in order to provide additional customer intelligence.

Further enhancements to the macro were completed to improve the management of No Access (NA) jobs. This means if an engineer had attempted to visit the tenant on more than three occasions, the job is referred back to HFI. Because British Gas Housing Services Group has a legal requirement to ensure an annual service check is carried out, these situations need to be addressed quickly and efficiently.

Customer Service Sets British Gas Housing Services Group Apart

Good customer service is an important differentiator and British Gas Housing Services Group realised that it needed a solution to provide a more efficient customer interface. "We aim to respond to customer needs as soon as possible so we can deliver client satisfaction in the most cost effective manner," says Heis. Attachmate developed a front-end application which allowed all Housing Services call centre staff to enter jobs, rather than only specified departments. This has significantly simplified the process, leading to considerable improvements in response times and customer satisfaction.

"We contacted Attachmate for a number of reasons. The first was its technology, which would allow us to create a customised and flexible business process which fulfilled our commercial requirements. The second was the company itself..."

— Rob Heis, Business Support Manager,
British Gas Housing Services Group

The original target of reducing the time spent entering data was successfully achieved, with British Gas Housing Services Group saving the equivalent of 1.5 full-time workers over the first 12 months. As well as improving productivity, the system raised both employee and customer satisfaction, as staff are now able to spend more time managing the customers—rather than inputting data.

Moving Forward with Attachmate Solutions

In the future, British Gas Housing Services Group believes that Attachmate solutions will be able to deliver similar benefits for other contracts. "The relationship with Attachmate has been extremely beneficial and we expect Attachmate solutions to remain an important part of our toolset," explained Heis. "This technology has enabled us to speed up response times to jobs, reduce man hours, and increase the value we gain from our existing systems. We believe that British Gas Housing Services Group will continue to benefit from the use of Attachmate solutions for a long time across the business."



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