

ICC (Iniciativas de Comunicación de Canarias) Teleworking and distributed working in a media services company¹

The challenge

ICC is a media services company based in the Canary Islands. It has offices on the islands of Gran Canaria and Tenerife and in Madrid on the Spanish mainland. The company employs 17 people and its principal activities are consultancy on marketing activities, mass media follow up and media monitoring. Its clients are principally public administrations and associations of SMEs, although it also provides services to some larger companies. Individual projects are concerned with call centre services, market analysis, promotional marketing, event organisation, monitoring press radio and TV, and web design.

Teleworking is very important to ICC because the company aims to provide services to all seven islands of the scattered Canary archipelago and to include services from coastal African countries of interest to its clients. It also wants to integrate disabled people into its workforce.

When considering new methods of working, the company's principal priorities were:

- overcoming the constraints of insularity
- improving the working environment of its employees
- improved response time to requests from clients
- reducing travel costs
- better co-ordination between branches and better co-ordination of project teams

The technical solution

The company developed and implemented a Linux based open-source Intranet based to provide a common interface for teleworking. Traditional groupware tools and a corporate mail system were installed to support electronic communications and teamwork. An Extranet was also established to provide electronic delivery of services to the final client.

As a result teleworkers and clients can log on (with different levels of access) to the main work platform, which contains historical databases and provides facilities for data entry, daily reports etc.

Some of the company's hardware (e.g. servers, routers, scanners, PCs) needed to be upgraded to implement the Intranet and the groupware to support teamwork.

The results

The system has helped ICC overcome the problems of being based on an archipelago and it can now run projects involving team members from all seven islands. Co-ordination between branch offices and between the members of project teams has been significantly improved and this, along with the fact that clients can have direct access to work over the Internet, means that the company can respond more quickly to their needs.

Workers have responded positively to the introduction of teleworking. Staff turnover and absenteeism have reduced significantly and individual teleworkers spend much less time travelling/commuting. This is a particular benefit to people working on the press cuttings service, who have to do most of their work between 5.30am and 7.00 am. They can wake up at a more reasonable time of the morning and still provide the clients with the latest material at the beginning of the normal working day.

Managers find it easier to monitor projects in a teleworking environment. They spend less time on routine management issues and can concentrate on more value-added activities.

¹ A more detailed case study can be found on the website of the IST project 'PROTELEUSES' (www.cbt.es/proteleuses), which analysed the ambitions of a number of SMEs and implemented flexible working solutions addressing the principal bottlenecks preventing the achievement of those ambitions.



The teleworking platform recovered its costs in less than half a year because it enabled the company to win a major contract with the Government of the Canary Islands for a campaign to promote the Euro in all seven islands.

The General Manager of ICC, Enrique Fárez, is himself one of the teleworkers and is enthusiastic about extending the teleworking platform to more services and employees. He says 'Teleworking has become a critical issue in our company. I want to stress that, thanks to telework, we can offer new services to our clients and exploit our skills in new markets. In this respect we have carried out two new projects which would have been unimaginable a year and a half ago.'

Conclusions

The ICC solution meets the company's needs by linking together commercially available groupware over the Internet to provide a platform for distributed teams involving teleworkers and to provide clients with more immediate access to the company's services.

A similar solution would be suitable for a wide range of services companies located in fragmented regions that want to extend their services and widen their client base without having to open large numbers of branch offices. It could also be of benefit to companies where some tasks involve extreme or unsocial working hours.