Canal & River Trust

The Canal & River Trust (CRT) are responsible for the maintenance and management of 2,000 miles of waterways in England and Wales. Launched in 2012, CRT took over the responsibilities of the state-owned British Waterways and they have established themselves as a trusted guardian of the historic inland waterways.

CRT are passionate about the impact that they can have on local communities and significant effort is made to deliver greater wellbeing to millions of people.

Growing pressure on income streams had been compounded by the impact of the coronavirus and CRT was therefore looking for ways to gain financial efficiencies. A review had highlighted the significant cost of their office estate across the UK and they were therefore looking at ways to reduce this space. SCC DS were able to propose an off-site digital mail solution, which not only removed the need for their on-site mailing facility, but also enabled agile working initiatives and reduced the CRT's reliance on their physical office space.

Challenges

As was the case for many businesses, Covid-19 and the resulting national lockdown in March 2020, highlighted the restrictions caused by traditional, paper based office processes. For CRT the inbound mail service in particular, as well as their outbound mail and general printing requirements, limited the success of their home working initiatives.

Inbound mail from all UK offices was redirected to the CRT head office in Leeds, where departmental staff were having to attend the office to sort the mail and forward onto the recipient, either as a scanned image or as a physical letter depending on the confidentiality and urgency of the mail item.

The key challenges associated with this process were as follows:

- The turnaround time from receiving mail in the office to the end recipient was extremely elongated taking upwards of a week for some items.

- The cost of processing mail was significant in terms of labour and lost productivity.

- The cost of maintaining an office for menial tasks such as opening mail was significant.

- The process was not sustainable or scalable as a long-term solution.

- The outbound mail process was subject to similar challenges, with staff following one of the following processes:

- Staff were emailing items to be printed by those attending the office for the inbound mail tasks.

- Staff were storing up outbound mail items and then travelling in to the office once a week to process and send.

- Staff with access to a printer, were buying envelopes, paper, ink and stamps to send mail items via a local post office or post box and claiming costs back on expenses.

Again, the aforementioned outbound mail tasks had become very disruptive, time consuming and costly in terms of both materials, labour and lost productivity.

Solution

SCC were an existing supplier of IT infrastructure, desktop support and software to CRT, and the specialist Document Services division of SCC was introduced to help support CRT with their agile working initiatives.

SCC Document Services (SCC DS) provided a solution to centralise and digitise both inbound and outbound mail via their Document Processing Units (DPU) in Manchester and Birmingham.

SCC DS worked closely with CRT facilities management teams to define specific business rules for the processing and distribution of mail. This was conducted by analysing existing temporary Covid-19 procedures and by liaising with department stakeholders to understand their individual requirements for both inbound and outbound mail.

Inbound Mail

Mail was redirected to SCC's Manchester DPU, where it is sorted and scanned for digital distribution to CRT staff subject to the following processes:

- Mail is first processed at an envelope level to determine which mail items are for scanning and which are to remain unopened and forwarded to the recipient.

- Mail items assigned for scanning are then automatically opened, prepared for scanning and a unique identification number assigned to each letter.

- Letters are bulk scanned in batches and digitally separated, classified, and routed to the intended recipient based on defined distribution rules developed with CRT.

- Special documents and items such as cheques, proof of ID, have additional processing applied to aid and streamline downstream processes for the recipient, and where applicable the special item is forwarded to the recipient or returned to the sender.

Outbound Mail

To meet the outbound mail requirements of a dispersed CRT team, SCC's Hybrid Mail Service was introduced to centralise and process all outbound mail. Where a printed mail item is required, this is produced in SCC's Birmingham DPU. Mail items are sent to the Hybrid Mail Service via one of three ways:

- Uploaded via SCC's Outbound Mail Portal

- Captured via a local or network watch folder

- Via SCC's Hybrid Mail print driver

SCC's Hybrid Mail print drive was deployed to all CRT employees, and is the preferred method by which to send ad-hoc mail by most service users. Users send letters to print as they normally would, except the folding, collating and stuffing of envelopes is no longer required.

The network watch folder is typically used to capture system output or bulk mail sending. No existing system integration was needed, simply the ability to output files to a local drive or network location.

SCC DS continue to drive innovation within the service and have recently presented a proposal for a digital outbound communication solution that would further enhance CRT's digital agenda.

General Print Requests

SCC DS also introduced an off-site print solution for CRT to help support their home workers. A bespoke reprographics request form was created for CRT and requests are processes centrally through the SCC DS DPU. All completed print jobs are then posted to the specified location, including employee home addresses and supplier addresses.

Benefits

CRT now benefit from a number of operational and financial benefits including:

- **Financial efficiencies** savings through improvements in staff productivity.

- **Facilitates agile / remote working** with a uniform way of receiving and sending mail regardless of location.

- **Improved reactivity to customer communications** CRT staff now receive inbound communication earlier, with the distribution of mail down to less than 2hrs from receipt.

- **Mitigated business interruption during Covid-19 lockdown** SCC DS were able to quickly implement the solution, with very light customer IT involvement and minimal resource requirements from CRT.

- **Improved governance** with a full audit trail for all inbound and outbound correspondence.

- **Improved business management information** with granular reporting provided to aid and develop the Trust's communication strategy.

Testimonial

"As is the case for many businesses, the past 12 months and the Covid-19 pandemic have presented a number of significant challenges. SCC DS were able to quickly understand our requirements and rapidly implement a solution that allowed us to continue to operate in a very turbulent landscape. The introduction of a digital inbound and outbound mail service has allowed our staff to continue to operate effectively from any location. Our relationship with SCC DS has continued to grow and develop, as they present further service enhancements and digital innovations."

Claire Skeels, National Facilities Manager

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