Part of the family

Bringing pet food franchise holders together with cloud communications

Franchise business OSCAR was using a fragmented combination of Lotus Notes and personal email addresses to communicate with customers and each other.

Kelros introduced IBM Verse to bring all email and calendar systems under the company brand. With IBM Connections, OSCAR business owners are now also dynamically in touch with instant messaging – enabling more informed sales, and setting OSCAR apart.

It's no secret that hosting communications in the cloud offers tangible benefits for all types of business. But for an organisation whose people are dotted across the UK, those benefits are amplified. When Kelros saw the potential for a franchise-based pet food business to grow and flourish using IBM Verse and Connections, it took the initiative to introduce new Dual Entitlement licencing – with impressive early results.

OSCAR, the UK's largest pet food home delivery service, has been supported by Kelros for many years with on-premise licencing for its email communications. But although the staff at its Preston head office could work fairly smoothly with their Lotus Notes system, it was a different story for its 105 franchise holders. Each one has always been responsible for their own email system, in a fragmented communications environment bound to become more complex as the company grew.

As Richard Martin, MD at OSCAR, explained, "Each business owner has an OSCAR email address, but it's really a forwarding mechanism that means replies are still sent from their own personal address. That's not good for the image of the business, or for encouraging customers to trust our people."

For training and information, OSCAR staff have an intranet system including a forum, product manuals and offers. But for franchise holders who spend most of their time on the road, proactively logging in and bringing themselves up to date is not always practical.

Seizing the right moment to move into the cloud

With a licence renewal due, Kelros identified that OSCAR had real potential to become a stronger, more unified business using IBM Verse and Connections. They demonstrated the new solutions to Richard and explained what IBM Verse & Connections would enable OSCAR to achieve.

Kelros recognises that fundamental changes in communications systems can seem daunting for smaller companies, so to address this they provided a dual entitlement licence. This would allow OSCAR to keep using its legacy email system, but roll out cloud-based email and messaging to selected users at its own pace. As a result, the company was fully confident to take up the IBM solution, and adopt the cultural shift to working in the cloud.

"The IT department at OSCAR is really just me," commented Richard. "I'm no expert, but the Kelros team made it easy to understand what IBM Verse would do, and took care of the whole implementation behind the scenes. Our new solution seemed to be ready with just a few emails to new users, and I can honestly say we had zero business disruption during that time."

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Empowering sales from the ground up

The shift in how OSCAR business owners communicate is more than a question of IT. It's a cultural upgrade that will potentially improve functions across the business – training, customer service, marketing, sales and recruitment to name a few. Externally, IBM Verse and Connections support the OSCAR brand by making all business owners part of the same communications system. Customers are left with no doubt who they're dealing with.

Internally, business owners and office staff can message each other instantly using Connections. They can get real-time support from their peers to answer customer enquiries, and easily see information on special offers. And crucially, they can access nutritional advice in a more dynamic way, without having to log into an intranet system or read archived manuals. Together, this means the OSCAR team not only enjoys a smooth, contemporary communications facility, but can actually enhance sales as a direct result of Kelros' recommended solution.

"We work in a very emotive field. Pets are part of the family," says Richard. "We need our business owners to be efficient, capable and trusted by their customers. With quick access to the latest information through Verse and Connections, they are empowered to sell the right products to take care of our customers' pets. Ultimately, that's what our business relies on."

A revolutionary first for franchises

Operating independently, being on the road, visiting customers, making deliveries: this style of work no longer poses any barriers to OSCAR franchise holders. By introducing the right IBM solution, Kelros has stopped the fragmentation in its tracks. Instead, they've set OSCAR on the path to an inclusive, dynamic communications culture.

Richard Martin believes it could be a first for franchised businesses. "With this IBM solution we're setting a positive example," he says. "It's revolutionary not only to our business, but to the franchise model itself. I don't know of another franchise business that's made this shift, but Kelros has shown us that the cloud isn't just for tech companies and start-ups. It's a realistic option for any business wanting to communicate effectively."

About Kelros

Kelros specialises in messaging and social collaboration solutions built on IBM software for clients in all sectors.

Our aim is to provide clients with an industry-leading proposition, combining our deep understanding of the challenges businesses face with expert and detailed knowledge of the technology solutions. We offer a full range of services from consultation and development of a bespoke solution, through to deployment, training and ongoing support.

Established in 1996, Kelros has developed long-standing partnerships with clients through its range of integrated, easy to deploy solutions for sales and marketing, human resources, finance and operations.

All of our technical consultants are IBM-certified with extensive specialist experience in IBM Connections, Sametime, Domino & Notes. We have a dedicated support team, which supports hosted and on premise applications and messaging infrastructure for over 120 clients.

A key Kelros differentiator is IBM software licensing. Through optimized licensing agreements and dual entitlement licensing, we ensure our clients have low software acquisition costs and minimal administration tasks, whilst maximising the benefits of IBM solutions.

Kelros IBM Expertise	Kelros Software and Tools	Introducing IBM Verse & Connections

IBM Connections is a set of secure, easy-to-use collaboration tools. It combines email, messaging, online document editing and conferencing to facilitate seamless teamwork.

IBM Verse sits within IBM Connections. It's an email hosting solution that users can access from their desktop or mobile device. IBM Verse uses social analytics to help users focus on important content and collaborate easier.

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