

Case study

Etihad Airways

Assuring special service levels for high-flying guests

When Ruth Birkin joined Etihad she stepped straight onto the up escalator taking the young airline towards its hopes and dreams. But she also stepped into a hot seat; responsible for managing and developing its global contact centres.

Etihad is facing tremendous growth, and Ruth's ingenuity was called into play to virtualise its global contact centres. Now calls collected from 37 different countries are routed to an available agent in one of three locations: Abu Dhabi and Al Ain in the UAE, and Manchester in the UK.

It's not for nothing that Etihad calls its customers guests, rather than passengers. That ethos pervades everything it does. The experience the airline's guests get at its contact centres is much more than welcoming. They're made to feel truly special by agents speaking callers' mother tongues in a choice of 14 languages.

“Experiencing the same feeling of specialness, wherever the caller lands, is paramount. Our contact centres are the voice of Etihad; essential to achieving that.”

Ruth Birkin, Head of Global Contact Centres, Etihad Airways



Case study

Etihad Airways

“We’re going into the next stage of our development with BT as a partner and, in terms of the creative use of technology, that’s really important for us.”

Ruth Birkin, Head of Global Contact Centres, Etihad Airways

A BT cloud-based virtual contact centre helps Etihad deliver own-language service excellence to guests from 37 countries

Treated as guests from the word go

In just ten years, Etihad Airways has established itself as one of the world’s leading airlines. Treating its customers as guests rather than fare-paying passengers, its contact centre is the most important opportunity to create that vital first impression.

“As the national carrier of the United Arab Emirates, wherever our guests are around the world we want them to feel special from the very first phone call,” explains Ruth Birkin, Head of Global Contact Centres at Etihad Airways.

The airline could see enormous business benefits from virtualising its contact centres for total transparency across three sites in Abu Dhabi and Al Ain in the UAE and Manchester in the UK. BT Inbound Contact Global voice services had already been deployed to collect calls from 37 different countries and route them to any one of over 500 Etihad agents. It was thus a logical step to investigate a BT contact centre solution.

Contact centre virtualisation brings riveting benefits

The fully-managed BT Cloud Contact service chosen by Etihad is based on a Cisco platform. It features IVR and workforce optimisation with call recording, all delivered from the cloud using flexible, pay-as-you-go commercial terms. During its deployment BT Advise Contact consultants helped Etihad analyse the desired customer experience to develop new call flow roadmaps.

Making a single virtual entity of the Manchester and UAE contact centre locations, the BT Cloud Contact Cisco platform has enabled the creation of teams covering 14 different languages. The BT Inbound Contact Global service means callers from the 37 countries can be dropped straight into the right language team in any one of the three contact centres.

“One of the things we really look to BT for is to be able to support us in all of the markets we operate in,” says Ruth. Such is the power of virtualisation that, rivetingly, the Korean language team is based in Manchester. A BT IP Connect Global network service running at 8Mbps interconnects the Manchester contact centre with the UAE-based Etihad customer database.

Opening new channels and new routes

The BT Cloud Contact Cisco solution also supports multichannel communication, integrating outbound and inbound telephony, email, and text traffic into a single queue. That more efficient call handling has raised customer service still higher. Meanwhile, BT Optimise Contact provides essential insight and management information across the three contact centres, enabling Etihad to maximise performance while reducing operating costs through agent resource optimisation.

Furthermore, newfound agility is making contact centre management much simpler when Etihad opens new routes, like Abu Dhabi to Madrid, Spain, in 2015. Says Ruth: “When moving into new markets it’s about ordering new numbers, advertising

and testing them, and starting to recruit languages. All those things have to be done in advance so when we make those requests of the BT team it’s important that all happens quickly and smoothly.”

With BT Cloud Contact, complex issues like setting up Spanish menus (the 38th country and 15th language) on global IVR systems have become child’s play.

Keeping guests comprehensively informed

The airline industry is understandably affected by adverse atmospheric conditions like hurricanes or volcanic ash clouds. “One thing’s certain; every day’s different,” says Ruth. “Whether it’s delays caused by bad weather at an airport around the world or an aircraft with a technical issue elsewhere, we’re now able to execute contact centre contingency plans to support our guest much more quickly.”

The Etihad contact centre management team gets regular updates throughout the day in terms of anything that could potentially impact operations. A toll-free disruption number can be put live through BT and quickly published to the airline’s guests, actually telling them what’s happening and what to do.

It’s not just voice, of course. Unrest in Egypt saw a curfew clamped on night flights. Etihad guests were texted and emailed, and called on their mobiles, to ensure they were able to re-plan their travel in a timely fashion. “Direct connection from the Etihad Network Operations Centre to our contact centres makes that sort of responsiveness possible,” says Ruth.



Case study

Etihad Airways

“For an airline it’s like a brain, heart and lung transplant all at once. Our front office would be working with paper and pens for 24 hours as we transferred every single flight, guest booking and schedule.”

Ruth Birkin, Head of Global Contact Centres, Etihad Airways

Collaborating to ensure systems transplant’s success

Etihad also uses BT MeetMe and WebEx voice and web conferencing services for internal collaboration. That came even more to the fore recently when Etihad decided to move its entire reservation system onto a new platform. The thoroughness of the preparation went well beyond plain old careful planning.

Ruth explains: “For an airline it’s like a brain, heart and lung transplant all at once. Our front office would be working with paper and pens for 24 hours as we transferred every single flight, guest booking and schedule.”

Using BT MeetMe and WebEx collaboration technologies, departmental virtual rooms were set up with hourly status

reporting and escalation processes to an executive virtual room. The system was configured to broadcast messages to all virtual rooms should that be necessary.

Says Ruth: “BT went one step further by putting a virtual expert team at our disposal for the entire 72-hour period.” That virtual team was synched-in with the airline’s collaborative processes using the same conferencing technologies. That meant if Etihad met any contact centre challenges it had immediate onsite escalation to assure 100 per cent operation.

Ruth concludes: “We’re going into the next stage of our development with BT as a partner and, in terms of the creative use of technology, that’s really important for us.”

Core services

- BT Cloud Contact Cisco
- BT Inbound Contact Global
- BT Optimise Contact
- BT Advise Contact
- BT IP Connect Global
- BT Collaborate MeetMe and WebEx



Offices worldwide

The services described in this publication are subject to availability and may be modified from time to time. Services and equipment are provided subject to the respective British Telecommunications plc standard conditions of contract. Nothing in this publication forms any part of any contract.

© BT Communications Ireland Ltd

Registered office: Grand Canal Plaza, Upper Grand Canal Street, Dublin 4
Phone +353 (0)1 4325000 Freephone 1800 924 924
Registered in Ireland No. 141524

Find out more
about BT Ireland

 www.btireland.com

 Freephone 1800 924 929

 business@btireland.com