



Southern Water

This UK-based utility provides water supply and wastewater treatment services across Kent, East and West Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Southern Water is responsible for delivering clean, fresh water to around one million households in the South East of England. Southern Water also treats and recycles dirty water from nearly two million households.

The Problem

In October-2005, the new Management team of Southern Water discovered inconsistencies in the reporting of service standards and immediately brought them to the attention of Water Services Regulation Authority (OFWAT) and the Serious Fraud Office (SFO).

The inconsistencies were discovered during the implementation of a new customer billing system and were related to the reporting of response levels and handling of customer inquiries and complaints. These inconsistencies meant that some customers did not receive due compensation under a Guaranteed Standard Services (GSS) scheme, where the company is obliged to make payments if it did not respond to letters within certain timescales.

The company then launched a joint inquiry with OFWAT, bringing in a specialist team of independent investigators from KPMG. Work was also initiated to make payments due under the GSS scheme. During the course of investigation, thousands of microfilmed records covering the previous 9 years were required to be reviewed.

The number of paper documents totaled about 13 million and undertaking such a huge job in-house was beyond the capabilities of Southern Water. They entrusted this job to their IT services provider Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) – one of the world's largest suppliers of very large mission critical application systems development services. At that point in time TCS did not possess any Business Process Outsourcing capabilities and therefore outsourced the work to their group company Computer Maintenance Corporation (CMC). CMC possessed BPO experience in the Indian market, but, had never provided these services to overseas clients.

On strength of Tathya's demonstrated ability to satisfy the most discerning overseas clients mainly on the security and turn around time areas and because Tathya was already doing similar jobs for some of their US clients, Tathya was finally chosen to provide the off-shore services on CMC's behalf.

The Challenge

The main challenge was to digitize, review, sort, categorize and capture data from different types of correspondences (numbering 13 millions) which were part of Southern Water's communication with its customers. The data thus captured would be stored in an Oracle database and would be used as a driver for deriving valid GSS claims.

Tathya, by that time, was doing a number of image-based BPO jobs for its UK and US clients and was able to satisfy both Tata and Southern Water regarding quality, data security and turnaround times. But, this job was of a scale never before handled by Tathya – it was at least 15 times the largest BPO job we had handled at that time as far as team size goes! The job needed 700 BPO executives and a team of 50 managers and programmers to work



for at least 6 months in order to process the huge volume of scanned images and generate the reports the client needed.

The Solution

Tathya's physical infrastructure was already prepared to take up a job of this dimension. But, Tathya at that point was a mere 170 person outfit and was still a small company doing well and growing steadily. The management structure was still not very formalised and had inefficiencies and sub-optimality characteristic of a small company growing rapidly out of the small company framework. On top of the physical infrastructure, Tathya leadership needed to quickly build a credible management and delivery framework that was only partially there at that point in time. However, barring a few early and minor hiccups, the solution that we provided made the humungous job look almost effortless.

- 1) The On-shore part of the project was executed by TCS/CMC, which dealt with image capture from microfilms to DVDs and shipping them to Tathya in Kolkata.
- 2) The entire Off-shore part of the project was handled by Tathya.
 1. We created the production environment which included hardware setup, networking setup, human resource mobilisation and training.
 2. The entire setup was created following closely strict security guidelines provided by KPMG. The security features included biometric access control system, CCTV monitoring of the work-floor, secured Internet connectivity and setting up of a parallel site at Hyderabad for disaster recovery.
 3. We developed the entire work-flow application, which had the following broad modules:
 1. Document Unitization (the process of determining document boundaries and attachments – this can be thought of as a virtual stitching or stapling process).
 2. Document Classification into various complaint types.
 3. Quality Assurance for Document Unitization & Classification
 4. Data Capture from Documents
 5. Quality Assurance for Data Capture
 6. Data storage management
 7. Reports generation
 8. Management Dashboard to track and monitor project progress in real time.
 4. The quality assurance procedures followed double entry method and sample lot quality checking using BS-6000 guidelines (a British Standard for inspection sampling procedures).
 5. The project was executed within 6 months, with 700 operators working in 3 shifts. The process was supported by various teams of programmers, database administrators, network administrators and hardware engineers besides a pool of experienced project managers.
 6. The physical infrastructure had used 250 work stations and 3 high end servers.



Benefits Accrued to Various Stake Holders

As a result of the investigation that was facilitated by our providing an extensive indexing of all customer correspondences, Southern Water was able to identify and make payments of over £500,000 to customers who had been disadvantaged. This constituted an immense boost in the image of the company in both the eyes of the compliance bodies in the UK and of Southern Water's customers. The SFO had launched an investigation, but, in April, 2007 – as a direct consequence of the good publicity following the pay outs – announced that it would not be continuing its inquiry.

The project was a very high visibility project within TCS and CMC as Southern Waters was one of their larger IT clients. TCS and CMC could not afford to lose face in this project as that would have tarnished their image within the UK to a great extent. At the end of the project, TCS and CMC executives congratulated Tathya leadership profusely because they felt that the project was able to deliver the right image for TCS within UK water utilities industry segment. Moreover, at the end of the financial year 2006-07, this project was adjudged the best administered project within CMC and the project team then congratulated Tathya to have made this accolade possible..