

A bid for uniformity

UK bank Barclays brings consistency to its branch network by using a single source for its desktop environment and managed services.

When it comes to the adoption of desktop managed services, organisations need to understand how their different implementation options can determine the level of business benefit they are likely to achieve.

In a large organisation, it is common for different departments or country operations to have chosen their own (often local or specialist) supplier for managed services. While that may suit individual units, the approach can mean the company as a whole can lose out on many of the benefits of a wider strategy.

Two years ago, Barclays Bank realised it was in such a position. The desktop machines in its 2,000 branches had been sourced from several different vendors, with support for those PC environments sourced from a mix of independent services suppliers, in-house teams and hardware vendors themselves. So when it embarked on a complete refresh of the branch network's desktop environment, the bank looked for a single partner.

"If you went into any branch three or four years ago, you could have seen Compaq, IBM, Dell – you name it," says Frank Tudor, supplier relationship manager at Barclays. "We made a strategic decision to have a single desktop provider, with the understanding that the economies of scale would drive down the acquisition price and the total cost of ownership."

The bank decided that it could drive costs even lower by placing the managed services contract with the winner of the PC bid – as long as the supplier would also commit to supporting the many third party systems in branches, such as proof-of-deposit machines used to scan paying-in slips and cheques.

In early 2004, after evaluating tenders from all the major PC companies, the bank chose Dell Computer, awarding the company a three-year contract to provide and support 17,000 PCs and 34,000 peripherals. "Of all the hardware suppliers at the time, Dell was the most capable and competitive supplier – and we think that remains the same today," says Tudor.

Under the contract, which offers Barclays savings of more than £1 million over the three years, Dell is now a single point of accountability for all desktop support.

The first year of the contract has not been without its teething problems, however. "Because Barclays' branch environment is complex, there were inevitably some headaches at the start," with says Tudor. "I think ourselves and Dell slightly underestimated the complexity in the new environment."

Barclays has established a dedicated team to track the level of service Dell is providing. Edna Cheer, Barclays' service performance manager for the contract, says they have worked closely with the company to enhance the service delivered. In early phases that has involved drilling down on individual incident data in order to understand particular user and system issues. The scale of the project has meant that Barclays is only now getting beyond the level of micro-management and looking at broader areas of how the service can be enhanced, says Cheer.



Barclays Bank

BARCLAYS BANK is one of the world's top 10 largest banks, with 10.6 million current account holders in the UK, around a million business customers and £60.8 billion in mortgages under management. In early 2004, it signed a deal with Dell for the purchase and support of 17,000 PCs for its 2,000 branches throughout the UK.

One aspect of the project that has surprised both companies is the ability of end-users to struggle with the new equipment – and many have required extra training. "We believe we've put a fairly sturdy, stable IT environment into the branches," says Tudor. "But never underestimate the ability of the end-user to break something. If we were to do this over again, we'd put education and training at the top of the priority list."

And Cheer adds: "You can get experts to test technology and applications before installing them, but what you can't say is how users are going to use a device. If a client decides to use a device incorrectly and not bother to do preventative maintenance and housekeeping, you can't plan for it."

A year into the contract, Barclays says that Dell is meeting all the agreed service levels, and some locations are even increasing their requirements from a six-hour systems repair level to a three-hour level, confident Dell can meet them.

Tudor's final advice to any company thinking of entering into a managed services arrangement is to think through the entire value chain, outsourcing all relevant elements – but, above all, to establish end-user education as the highest priority. ①