



University for Industry – Bridging the Digital Divide with myguide



In a major project backed by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), LogicaCMG was contracted by Ufi to develop myguide, an online system designed to engage those sectors of the population unfamiliar with the Web or those with access difficulties. The pilot has proved highly successful and myguide will be rolled out next year as part of the government's overall inclusion agenda.

“LogicaCMG’s implementation of tried and tested open source technology to form the foundations of myguide has ensured a stable system for the pilot and offers the scalability we need to extend its use to as many as half a million customers in the future.” Robin Jeeps, Head of Programme Development, Ufi.

Ufi Overview

Ufi is a government-backed organisation with a mission to use technology to transform the skills and employability of the working population to improve the UK’s productivity. Ufi is responsible for the operation of learndirect and also runs thousands of UK online centres across England which offer access to the Internet and e-learning to individuals from all walks of life, including an estimated two million socially disadvantaged people.

The Business Requirement

The government has ambitious plans to bring many of its services online in a drive to improve efficiency; however, these plans must support the Inclusion Agenda, giving access to as many individuals as possible to the Internet. It is estimated that up to a third of the UK population are ‘disengaged’ from the Internet. This group includes many elderly or physically impaired individuals and those who currently lack the skill or equipment to take advantage of the Internet.

Backed by DfES funding, Ufi developed plans for a pilot service that would open up the Internet for these groups and provide access to government services via the Government Gateway. This is the shared infrastructure for communicating and making transactions with many different government departments and is one of the cornerstones of the government’s strategy for delivering ‘joined-up’ government.

The pilot system would need to be intuitive to use and overcome accessibility issues of customers with special needs to ensure its universal appeal. The technology also had to be scalable, as on completion of a successful pilot, myguide would be rolled out across the country to enable all those not currently benefiting from the availability of e-services to access the Internet.

myguide had to be built on open source software, to allow DfES and Ufi to retain full entitlement to customise the product as much as possible in the future; something they could not necessarily achieve with proprietary software.

“ In LogicaCMG, we had a partner who would deliver the product we wanted to a high specification. Their experience with open source software was also a critical factor in the decision process. ”

Robin Jeeps, Head of Programme Development, Ufi.

The LogicaCMG Solution

It was clear from the beginning that the timescales for delivery were tight, with only four months between the contract award and the pilot launch. LogicaCMG selected software that delivered some of Ufi's requirements out of the box so development time was kept to a minimum. The decision was also made to use open source technology that had been available for some time, to reduce the possibility of technical problems which could cause delays. Another element key to the success of the myguide delivery was use of LogicaCMG's offshore services.

"LogicaCMG's offshore development team in Bangalore had the task of turning the plans for myguide into a reality. Development offshore kept costs reasonable and ensured the right number of experts could be focused on the project to meet the very challenging deadline." Nneka Abulokwe, Senior Project Manager, Government Division, LogicaCMG.

myguide is a portal website which guides customers through each stage of accessing the Internet, sending or receiving email and customising the site to suit their individual preferences. It has been designed to support customers of any age or ability, including those with a variety of special needs. Even the most inexperienced user can use myguide to send and receive email or use the simplified search engine as a door to the wealth of information and services available on the web.

LogicaCMG worked closely with a number of disability experts to ensure customers with cognitive, mobility or visual difficulties could access the site. A range of methods have been employed to ensure myguide meets the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)'s Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) AA recommendations for web accessibility. For example, customers with visual impairments can alter the colour of the background or size and colour of text, to provide contrast. Assistive technologies have been integrated, such as ReadSpeaker, to read out web pages, and PhoneAnything to navigate the site via telephone. LogicaCMG have also added an interface to the Alerts Online service which integrates myguide with a user's mobile phone to allow customers to setup SMS Alerts to notify them of new emails and updates to their saved search profiles.

Ufi continually put the system through an independent, comprehensive testing process with real customers to evaluate its success in improving Internet accessibility in the community and the resulting feedback is used by LogicaCMG to update and improve the site on an ongoing basis.

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Following the success of the pilot, myguide is planned to be made available to the whole of the target population. This will give many previously excluded individuals access to the Internet helping achieve the government's key inclusion and e-Government goals.

The Benefits

The main benefits have been:

- **High degree of accessibility** – Of the current registered myguide customers, 65% are over the age of 45, 57% have no formal qualifications and 19% are disabled; demonstrating the diversity of usage crucial to the success of the project.
- **Ease of use** – 95% of those with little or no previous experience of the Internet managed to send email after using myguide.
- **Scalability** – myguide is built on cost-effective, open source technology designed to scale up to half a million customers once the pilot is extended nationwide.
- **Excellent system stability** – The superior quality of open source software selected by LogicaCMG ensures there are fewer technical issues to overcome. LogicaCMG also host and manage the system ensuring any issues which arise can be dealt with immediately by trained experts.
- **Evolving technology** – Ufi are consistently specifying improvements so the LogicaCMG team can update and upgrade the myguide site based on user feedback.

“ As we had insisted on using open source technology to build myguide we were expecting to come up against a myriad of technical problems. The expertise and professionalism demonstrated by LogicaCMG in choosing good, stable technology meant that these technical issues did not materialise. ”

Robin Jeepe, Head of Programme Development, Ufi.

LogicaCMG is a major international force in IT services. It employs 30,000 people across 36 countries. LogicaCMG's focus is on enabling its customers to build and maintain leadership positions using LogicaCMG's deep industry knowledge and its track record for successful delivery. The company provides business consulting, systems integration and IT and business process outsourcing across diverse markets including telecoms, financial services, energy and utilities, industry, distribution and transport and the public sector. Headquartered in Europe, LogicaCMG is listed on both the London Stock Exchange and Euronext (Amsterdam) (LSE:LOG; Euronext:LOG).

More information is available at www.logiacmg.com