Norfolk County Council enjoy a great return on investment with Groupcall Xporter

Norfolk County Council is located on the East coast of England and the region comprises of 431 schools with more than 96,000 pupils. Michael Pickett, ICT Shared Services Technical Design Architect first came across Groupcall when he attended the SIF Association UK Conference in March 2007.

Michael explains: "We initially undertook 2 pilots (including the use of Groupcall Xporter's extended SIF [Systems Interoperability Framework)] functionality which simply plugged in to our open standards-based SIF infrastructure) required to meet our distinct business and technical objectives. The first objective was to extend a solution for a cohort of 10 Secondary Schools all collaborating in the West of Norfolk.

Our aim was to seamlessly integrate each schools Management Information System (MIS) with their Fronter Learning Platform and use a common set of authentication identity credentials – (the Norfolk ID) for simplified sign-on. The Norfolk ID is a unique and e-safe identity allocated to every pupil and every member of school staff across the county which they hold throughout their time in education throughout Norfolk.

Our second objective was to securely share attendance data and the Norfolk ID between a number of participating 14 to 19 schools, colleges and work placements. In both cases each learning establishment had its own MIS; Serco CMIS, Capita SIMS or Tribal EBS.

We had previously used solutions that relied heavily on manual intervention and that also incurred extra costs such as timeliness and accuracy. Following the successful pilots, the identity management and learning platform integration [from a great success] and we have since extended this to all Norfolk schools, describing the service as 'business as usual'. Not only is Groupcall Xporter (with SIF functionality) facilitating the interoperability with learning platforms and our Identity Management (IdM) service, but we are now using it for a 'Cloud' hosted Capita SIMS MIS deployment to the majority of our Primary and Secondary Schools plus Academies. In addition, we have 'plugged-in' Google Apps for Education and more services are in the pipeline.

Our interoperability infrastructure – or Integration Platform as a Service (iPaaS) – is now an integral component of Norfolk's Cloud Computing strategy and offered as part of our broadband service.

There were many reasons that we chose to purchase Groupcall Xporter. Foremost was the demonstrable expertise and solutions oriented approach shown by Groupcall's employees in the open standards SIF arena; this has had a measured effect upon the development of this important open standards in the UK. Feedback from other Local Authorities confirmed that the Xporter solution is lightweight with low overheads in terms of management and cost plus it delivers a great return on investment. Our pilots and subsequent large-scale rollouts support this.

Groupcall were already established in the market with the number and variety of applications and services that could be integrated into local authority systems. They were also prominent as a company at the leading edge in the SIF environment so this seemed a natural progression for us.

The rollout of the successful solution was seamless and smooth with the contribution and help of the Groupcall team who without exception are always on hand to assist. They combine friendliness, professionalism, expertise and above all a thorough understanding of our business. Groupcall are always ready to discuss and participate in some of the more ambitious and possibly 'out there' ideas for solutions to business problems.

Michael concludes: "Minimal training was required and support documentation was provided. Using Groupcall Xporter with SIF Agent functionality has helped us to realise all of the benefits associated with an open interoperability architecture such as SIF including:

• Better data security
• Efficiency and accuracy gains – simply enter data once and reuse many times
• Agility and flexibility as well as integration cost savings (adding or switching an application or service no longer requires complex and often bespoke integration work).

We are now able to manage a complex real-time Identity Management service on behalf of our schools including over 140,000 unique identities and a surprising amount of inter-school movement with a minimum resource commitment so our schools are delighted.

" Groupcall's aftersales support and service has been excellent and as an Authority we are pleased with the success that using Groupcall Xporter within our SIF infrastructure has already achieved. We were excited about how far we can build out on this success and expect to continue to exploit our investment! "

For further information on Groupcall's range of products, please contact us by calling: 020 8502 7344, email: info@groupcall.com or visit: www.groupcall.com/xporter