

LANSA Case Study

NSPCC revamps its supporter care system

The IBM i and LANSA-based supporter system of the NSPCC charity was developed in the late eighties. Being nearly three decades old, it still reliably holds several million supporter records and processes hundreds of thousands regular donations, mostly in modest amounts, amounting to a whopping £114 million last year.

But the 5250-user interface that the Supporter Care team used to access the data was way past its useful life. Initially the most obvious solution seemed to be to replace it with an off-the-shelf CRM system. However, such a solution would need to integrate with the existing supporter transaction processing system, greatly increasing complexity, risk and cost. The NSPCC decided instead to let LANSA develop a productive Windows user interface replacement with better functionality, but keeping the existing database structure intact. The new solution, implemented at a fraction of what a CRM integration would have cost, is greatly benefitting the NSPCC and its supporters and has kicked off a number of similar modernization projects.

NSPCC

The Role of the NSPCC

The NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) is the UK's leading children's charity fighting to end child abuse. The NSPCC works directly with children and families from its 40 service centers and is the UK's only children's charity with statutory powers, meaning it can take action to safeguard children at risk of abuse.

The services and resources that the NSPCC offers are too wide ranging to do justice in this short case study. To mention just a few:

Counselors at the NSPCC's HelpLine and ChildLine provide help and support to those who need it. Its School Service workers visit 9-11 year olds in schools to help them understand what abuse is and to give them the confidence to speak out and seek help if they ever need it. The NSPCC collaborates with frontline professionals to evaluate what works and provides best practice policies.

The overwhelming majority of NSPCC's funding – more than 90 per cent – comes from public donations and other fundraising.

The Challenge

People who donate or fundraise, collectively called supporters, are looked after by the Supporter Care team. The NSPCC has 6.2 million supporter records in its database, of which 1 million are active supporters and 700,000 are regular donators. NSPCC's marketing department keeps supporters informed with newsletters and campaign

"The system slowed us down and hampered the quality of our phone conversations."

updates, but supporters also have a need for individual attention and their queries come in by phone, email, mail and social media.

Alan Carter, Senior Manager Fund Raising, explains, "Whether they contact us to change their address, or to discuss leaving money in their will, we aim to give the supporter an excellent experience at all times. The Supporter Care system, in-house developed and IBM i- based, was functioning well in the sense that it was reliably holding large volumes of data and accurately processed hundreds of thousands of transactions each month. But the user interface for the Supporter Care team was inefficient."

The system's character-based user interface could show only limited information on a screen. You had to navigate through several screens to see, for example, a supporter's donation or mailing history. Also, recording notes was clunky, allowing for only one line at a time without any text wrapping. Moreover, documents, such as email attachments, could not be linked.



From Left to Right: Dawn Shortall, Business Support Officer, Hugh Havard, Supporter Care team member, and Alan Carter, Senior Manager Fund Raising.

Snapshot

Customer: The NSPCC is the UK's leading children's charity fighting to end child abuse. www.nspcc.org.uk

Challenge: The user interface used by the Supporter Care team to handle incoming queries was unproductive. A rip-and-replace approach would affect integration with the existing downstream transaction processing system.

Solution: Use Visual LANSA to develop a new solution for the Supporter Care team with a productive Windows interface and better functionality, but keeping the existing database structure intact.

Key Benefits: Time savings for the Supporter Care team, leaving more time for a quality conversation with the supporter.

Product Used: Visual LANSA

Procedures require that staff make a note about their interactions with the supporter, but they didn't get any help in doing so from the system. This led to duplication of effort. For example, staff would change an address in the database and separately make a note to log the fact that they had made such a change.

"The system slowed us down and hampered the quality of our conversations with the supporters," says Carter.

The Solution

Several response handling and hybrid phone/CRM systems were considered, which were discounted for various reasons. An important factor was that the new solution would require real-time integration with existing downstream supporter data and transaction processing systems, introducing a layer of complexity and greatly increasing risk and cost. Also, due to an impending office move, it was the wrong time for a new phone system. Last but not least, like other charities, NSPCC is under continuous scrutiny to be as lean and effective as it can be. Therefore high cost solutions were undesirable.

"After discussing the situation with a LANSAs consultant, we decided to provide the Supporter Care team with better functionality and a productive Windows style user interface, but keep the existing database structure intact," explains Carter.

Together with in-house business analysts, the Supporter Care team held several flip-board sessions, brainstorming what their ideal solution would look like. The main objectives were to improve operational efficiency and the supporter experience. A detailed specification document was created, which the LANSAs consultant developed into a working prototype, using Visual LANSAs. The team trialled the prototype and provided feedback and further refinements. Two months after the start of the project, the prototype went live into production.

The Benefits

"All important information is immediately right in front of us on the first screen, such as contact details, contact preferences and the donor's gift aid/tax status. We can switch easily between tabs to see the donation history, mailing history, notes and more," say Hugh Havard, Supporter Care team member. "This means we can focus on the conversation, rather than on getting the data on our screen."

"Notes are automatically created for 90% of the work we do. For example, when we change an address, a note is generated with the correct code, the old address, the operator's initials and a date/time stamp," continues Havard.

Staff now also have a proper free-format note section, with text wrapping and spell checking. Plus documents can be linked into the notes. "Having the relevant documents and untruncated notes is of enormous value for future conversations that we may have with the donor," says Havard.

Reporting, statistics and analysis are now directly driven from captured data. Previously each staff member maintained a spreadsheet, recording the nature of each phone call, such as tax inquiry, change of bank details, legacy conversation, and so on. "Not having to maintain these spreadsheets and not having

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to collate them at the end of each month saves a lot of time and has significantly reduced reporting inaccuracies," says Carter.

Donors can be fuzzy-searched by name, email, postal code and other criteria. Pressing the button kicks off an asynchronous search, leaving the window unlocked and available for other work. This may seem a small feature, but when you have 6.2 million supporters in your database it comes in very handy.

Havard points out that the new system saves time and also allows for more meaningful conversations with supporters. "We can now action the supporter's query immediately, but also have time to engage with them. Do they know how their donation is helping? Have they thought about leaving money to the NSPCC in their will? If we just said 'Yes, we have changed your details' and nothing else, we may lose them. It's all about keeping supporters engaged, and together with LANSAs we have developed a solution that really helps us to do that."

Carter agrees, "What the new system does is not only provide more time, but provide more quality time. That results in a better experience for the supporters and therefore they are more likely to stay engaged with us."

Conclusion

Leigh Day, a senior business analyst, concludes, "Using Visual LANSAs to essentially rework the tasks of the Supporter Care team has led to that rare thing: IS customer satisfaction. It has generated all sorts of efficiencies within the team and improvements to supporter interaction. The impact on the existing IS infrastructure and dependent systems was minimal, keeping the costs in check. It has been a real pleasure to be involved in such a warmly received and smoothly implemented project."

Dawn Shortall, a member of the Supporter Services team, explains "Now that it has been established that the our IBM i system is essentially sound and that with LANSAs it can easily and affordably be extended with new Windows functionality, many more ideas for other improvements are starting to pop up."

For example, locating and merging duplicate contacts in the database is high on the wish list. Another improvement on the list is to be able to associate supporters. For example where multiple people from a company, or a group of friends run a marathon together, the system will be able to indicate such a relationship.

Other teams are coming with requirements as well. The donations processing team handles all gifts and sends the supporter a thank you letter. Currently they are using a laborious way to create those letters, which involves multiple exports and mail-merges. With LANSAs we will create a solution to completely automate the generation of these personalized thank you letters, directly based on the data already available in the supporter system.

Company and System Information

- The NSPCC is the leading children's charity fighting to end child abuse in the UK and Channel Islands. The NSPCC helps children who have been abused to rebuild their lives, protect those at risk, and find the best ways of preventing abuse from ever happening.
- For more information visit: www.nspcc.org.uk

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