



Collaboration and knowledge-sharing in the cloud bring Swisscom's field technicians closer together

It can be extremely tough to collaborate effectively with colleagues while working on the move from a smartphone and for Swisscom's customer field service unit, this presented a big problem. When faced with this difficult issue, its service engineers needed to share knowledge and answers fast—as well as access important documents—but the company's purpose-built collaboration platform was not optimised effectively for mobile.



Customer details:

Swisscom

Size: 10,000+

Website: www.swisscom.ch/en/business.html

Country: Switzerland

Industry: Telecoms, TV, Network

Audience Commercial; Consumer; Developer; Education; Partner

Customer profiles

Swisscom AG is a major telecommunications provider in Switzerland. Swisscom holds a market share of 60% for mobile, 67% for broadband and 33% for TV telecommunication in Switzerland.

In 2001, 25% of Swisscom Mobile was sold to Vodafone. Since then, Swisscom has bought a majority stake in Italy's second-biggest telecom company Fastweb and invested in areas such as hospitality support, cloud services, mobile solutions and billing.

Software and services

Microsoft Office 365



So, to develop a bespoke platform that offered these tools, Switzerland's leading telecoms, software and TV service provider turned to Microsoft Office 365 with integrated Microsoft Teams to provide the solution—giving its 1,000-strong team of technicians the ability to access knowledge from anywhere during their diverse tasks, visiting both their customers and maintaining the vitally important wireline and wireless networking infrastructure in all of Switzerland.

Challenging connections

Working individually on the move as field service engineer means, if you get stuck, there is nobody else around to ask for help—and for Swisscom's 1,000-strong team of outdoor technicians, this was a big challenge. Not only was the company's collaboration platform not optimised for smartphones, making it difficult to download reference documents, but they would also have to ring, SMS, email or WhatsApp a colleague for assistance and await their answer; a solution that would often take time if they were busy on their own job.

When out in the field, in order to provide the best possible customer experience, it is vital for the service engineers to be closely connected with all their colleagues in Swisscom. In a dynamic networking and customer support organisation, things change quickly and as a customer touchpoint, in the living room of their customers, it is critical that the service technicians can always access current, fast and readily available information.

As the country's leading telecoms, software and TV service provider, the company had been using a web-based system for news production, web content and document management. But those running the customer field service unit found this platform slow and ineffective for its people while on visits to private, small and medium-sized business and enterprise customers, or when they are in remote locations maintaining their network infrastructure.

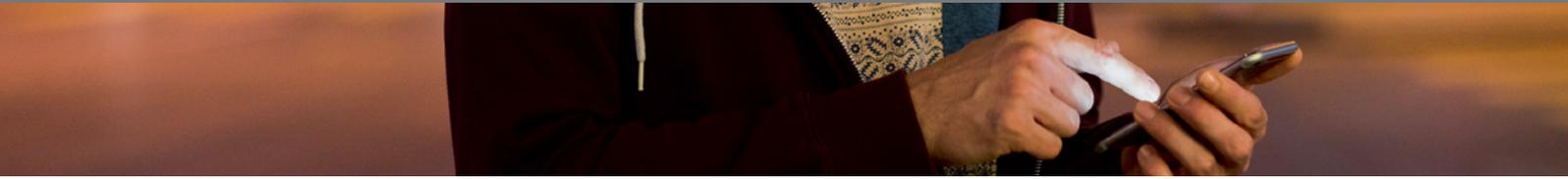
Helping team players

For a solution, it turned to Microsoft Office 365 and used the integrated Microsoft Teams to do away with these disconnected conversations. It soon allowed Swisscom to develop a fast, easy and unified way for large groups of engineers to pool their knowledge, collaborate and share answers online from wherever they were working across Switzerland.



"We have built a set of Teams groups where our technicians can ask questions and their colleagues can share their know-how, they are far more efficient and has improved how we all work together."

Urs Fuhrmann, Project Manager,
Transformation Development team,
Swisscom



The unit also wanted a way to create its own content—something that in the old environment was only possible in cooperation with a central editorial office. — and to do away with the fragmented set of tools it was using, such as an older version of SharePoint acting as a document repository.

Urs Fuhrimann, who works within transformational development at the unit, says: ***“Our technicians are mobile workers in their cars and they work a lot with their smartphones. The tools we used before Office 365 tools were less suitable for this type of work, so this implementation was a big opportunity for us to make a big step forward and as fast as possible.”***

Since the implementation, he describes how a huge culture shift has taken place within the unit. Previously, if a technician had a question, the team would be asked via a WhatsApp group, email or call to a colleague. This meant the same questions were often asked by multiple people and repeated throughout the business with multiple answers.

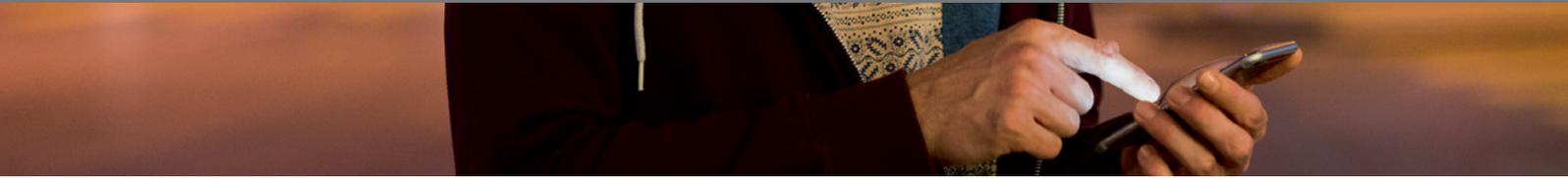
Urs explains the simplicity of the new system is key. He adds: ***“Now we can utilise the knowledge of the whole field service technician crew. The teams were fragmented all over Switzerland. Often 10 or 20 people asked the same question and 20 other people had an answer.”***

“Now we have built a Teams group for all these questions. The technician asks the questions and all the others can give them their know-how. It’s far more efficient and has improved how we all work together.”

Rollout

The rollout of Office 365 initially stemmed from a pilot Urs and Tobias Glatthard, Information and Knowledge Manager for the unit, were involved in at Swisscom. Both were ‘Genius’-level employees within the company’s WorkSmart Now programme. This allows employees to personally engage in the way the company works internally, share their knowledge and implement new digital tools.

As responsible for the internal communication strategy in their unit, the pair had access to a pilot pre-project in order to study how Office 365 could be used for their needs—looking at every tool from Microsoft Teams to SharePoint to Outlook, Planner, Stream and more.



Tobias believes this was a key factor in driving change fast by building a platform that was fully integrated with everything else his people would need, such as news and document management. He adds: ***"We were in a very early phase when we started thinking about the implementation of the Office 365 rollout within our unit. We really appreciated the pilot program because we could work out guidelines and prepare our users before actually rolling it out bit by bit."***

Urs believes the pilot also offered the technicians and wider company a chance to see the simplicity of using Office 365's tools when mobile. This gave swifter buy-in and cushioned the fear of moving away from shadow IT such as WhatsApp. He says: ***"Life is much easier now for our technicians because we have a suite of tools that are highly integrated and really easy to use and understand."***

"They are standard tools you can download in the app stores and now we are major users of Microsoft Teams and Microsoft SharePoint. Our technicians were really happy to make the switch from our fragmented communications platform. The whole community has a much higher quality of answer and the technicians can do a better job."

One positive bi-product of the implementation has been increased transparency, security, and communication; technicians now have a wider circle to call upon rather than just their own intimate teams. Urs adds: ***"Managers are involved so they can read and also answer questions. The communication has fewer levels of hierarchy, so managers and technicians can communicate directly in both directions."***

Tobias believes such fast and effective success has come because, culturally, the Office 365 and Teams platform was easy to integrate, no matter the level of 'digital fitness' of individual employees. It has also enabled the unit to deliver a system that can be used in the field between assignments; for example, technicians reading documents or simply spending time engaging with others. This has improved their overall productivity, he states, with each group of technicians having its own unique tools and setup in Teams, together with Planner and Stream. The system was provisioned from the start in collaboration with the engineers to ensure everybody finds the right space for them.



"This solution has enabled us to have a direct impact in the way we communicate. While we appreciate our big communication portals, we now have the best of both worlds - a highly integrated solution that allows us to publish content independently."

Tobias Glatthard, Information and Knowledge Manager



Another big advantage the unit has discovered is how quick and easy the system is to use, and how fast it can be updated, speeding up its operations and increasing efficiencies through fewer barriers to engage; this has created a more agile and dynamic interaction. According to Tobias: ***“Those periods are now much shorter than before. If one person sees a problem, something that doesn't adapt or information that is incorrect, most of the time that person is able to change it directly.”***

The move to Office 365 has also allowed the unit to fully embrace Swisscom's 'open book' philosophy, which aims to make it easy to share knowledge—something the pair acknowledged wasn't always simple for the customer field service unit to do with the tools they had.

“People now see they can easily build groups in Teams all over the different units, not in the silos, so ones that are more project or theme-orientated,” says Urs, who praises the simplicity of the new system. ***“It is increasing this 'open book' philosophy and these Office 365 tools are pushing that.”***

With 5G on the horizon, the unit believes this will further allow it to more easily share knowledge over video using Microsoft Stream, offering every technician a new way to communicate. But for now, it is giving the customer field service unit its own autonomy to do its job more effectively for its customers.

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Urs Fuhrmann

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