Faith restored in ICT support providers says professional institute, IRRV

After a bad experience outsourcing its ICT, moving over to a managed services provider that is responsive, with professionals who know what they were doing, and deliver on their promises was the answer for a leading professional institute.

The Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) is the largest professional institution operating in the field of revenues, benefits and valuation, with hundreds of students sitting IRRV examinations every year. The institute's key aim is to support its members' professional and personal development and share best practice. More than 3,500 members are kept informed of current issues through magazines, publications, conferences and meetings.

Shola Soyoye, Head of Database and IT systems at the IRRV, says that as a small organisation with 25 staff, they realised that with the pace of technological change they wouldn't be able maintain the level of skills required in-house and so decided to outsource their ICT.

"We used to have our IT in-house. The whole idea of outsourcing our IT came about because technology is getting to a place where you need a vast amount of skills. It is not cost effective to have staff doing this in-house."

Relationship break down
However, their first experience of outsourcing their ICT was disastrous, says Shola, *"We put out tenders and started working with another company. However, we didn't have a good experience with that company, at all. It was our first experience of having an outsourced facility, and we didn't get what we felt we were promised."*

The Institute regularly experienced serious operational disruption, where people working remotely couldn't log onto the system, access their emails or files. Shola says they lost all confidence in the ICT because the system was down so often and there was no indication of how long it would take to get back on stream. *"I was worried that I'd try to log on and wouldn't be able to, and there'd be nothing we could do."*

The relationship broke down very quickly and quite badly says Shola. *"We found ourselves in a situation where we had to make a very quick decision about whether to bring the IT back in-house or to look for another supplier. You can imagine how sceptical we were about looking for another supplier."*

"Bluecube cares about its relationships with customers. It is not just about answering phones through the night, but actually having a real concern."

Shola Soyoye, Head of Database and IT systems, IRRV

Search for a new provider
Because the IRRV had invested so much money and effort, they decided to find a new ICT provider, who could help them move over to a new system quickly and seamlessly. *"We had another round of tenders and that was when Bluecube came into the picture. We wanted a very quick turnaround, because we didn't have the time. Something had to be in place within two to three weeks."*

The IRRV shortlisted four companies and chose Bluecube because it did one thing the others didn't says Shola: *"What made me feel a bit more comfortable was the fact that the CEO, James Hawker came down to see me. The others sent managers or programmers. James was involved right from the beginning and he gave me the confidence that if anything did go wrong, I could hold him accountable."*

Reliability was the top priority

The IRRV's first and most important requirement was to have a highly reliable ICT system. Once that was in place, they wanted a highly responsive support service, with people on the end of a phone who could deal with any serious issues around the clock. *"We have flexible hours. A lot of our users work remotely and may need help at 11pm, because that is when they are working. It can't wait until the morning. We need an IT company that is truly – not just on paper – 24/7. If you tell me you are 24/ 7 - I expect somebody to be there."*

Do everything to resolve issues

Since working with Bluecube, Institute staff have hardly called on the after-hours support service, saying they would be surprised if they called Bluecube more than three times in the past year. *"But there's no time when I've picked up the phone and wanted help and there wasn't somebody at the other end of the phone,"* says Shola.

However, if there are any issues, they know that Bluecube will try everything to resolve them, says Shola. *"Bluecube cares about resolving issues quickly. As soon as I log a call, somebody calls back to say, 'I have your call and we are working on it', which I think is a fantastic piece of customer service. When opening a ticket, you know someone has seen that ticket. When it is resolved, they call to say 'It has been resolved. Are you happy with it?' I like the fact that they keep me in the loop and I know what's going on."*

New system installed in days

Shola was impressed by how fast Bluecube worked to move the IRRV over to a new ICT system. *"All the work was done over a bank holiday weekend. We started on Friday night and by Tuesday we were up and running – the comms, IT, everything. We had teething problems at the beginning but that is to be expected. 80% had been done by the Tuesday and by the end of the week we were fine."*

No one thinks about IT any more

The new ICT system has made a big difference, they say. Previously, when they had Board meetings or a major conference, they'd be apprehensive about whether the IT would work. *"Compared with the service we had before – it's a huge difference. No one thinks about the IT any more. They go with the assumption that things will work. That's a huge relief really, for the staff and for me."*

Issues resolved seamlessly

Uptime has been one of the biggest benefits of working with Bluecube says Shola, along with the commitment shown to solving issues. *"The last issue I had was when I was working quite late on a Sunday night before a major conference. Someone sent me an email, and that email never arrived. I realised we had an issue, so called Bluecube around 11pm saying 'I think we are not receiving emails'. The issue was finally solved at about 5am. When my users came in at 9am in the morning, they had no clue as to what had happened."*

"Before Bluecube, our up-time was maybe 70%. But with Bluecube we're close to – I wouldn't say 100% - but certainly 99%."

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