



Cisco solution helps Softcat develop the blueprint for future office expansion

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Softcat plc has been providing leading-edge IT solutions to public sector and commercial organisations for more than 30 years.

With offices across the UK and Ireland, its 250+ dedicated service professionals work closely with leading technology providers to deliver up-to-the-minute, high-value solutions to the challenges clients face. More than 10,000 longstanding customers rely on Softcat's consultants and developers to provide technical knowledge,

industry insight and real-world experience. And it's that marketplace awareness that enables Softcat to quickly and efficiently identify and deploy the technologies needed to improve business agility, enhance security and drive down cost.

Key Facts



The Challenge

Moving to a new office can be a challenge, but there's no doubt it's also an opportunity. While procuring new IT hardware and configuring office space is a huge financial investment, it also represents a chance to put in place technologies capable of enhancing the workplace experience, increasing safety and efficiency, and reducing ongoing costs.

Opening a new London office represented an opportunity for Softcat to implement solutions that would overcome longstanding issues that were hampering productivity and

user satisfaction in existing offices. With many businesses now reliant on Microsoft Teams for collaborative working, ensuring an optimal Teams user experience was deemed essential. It would deliver a more consistent, reliable method of enabling productive interaction between colleagues, regardless of the device used. But perhaps more importantly, it would help Softcat establish a technological blueprint capable of delivering safer and more productive office environments that are a pleasure to work in.

Critical Success Factors



The Solution

"We recently upgraded our Birmingham office and spent many months investigating what technologies were essential to creating a productive office environment. One of the things that really stood out was the need to provide reliable, feature-rich video communications solutions to facilitate the effective use of Microsoft Teams." - Ian Southwell, Softcat Infrastructure Manager

"Although in previous years we'd used Webex solutions to collaborate with colleagues, we'd seen a significant shift towards Microsoft Teams in the last couple of years. Our existing video communications infrastructure was failing to provide the optimal user experience we expected. You could join a meeting from a video conferencing suite and be unable to see PowerPoint Live content, for example, and this, alongside other inconsistencies in functionality, negatively impacted user satisfaction. It drove our decision to make Microsoft Teams the de facto standard and ensure the video communications infrastructure we planned to install in our new offices would provide the reliable and consistent user experience we sought." - Ian Southwell, Softcat Infrastructure Manager

Following a thorough marketplace analysis, Softcat decided on a suite of Cloud-based Cisco Workspace solutions, including:

- **Cisco Spaces** - which integrates seamlessly with existing Cisco infrastructure to gather and analyse location-based data, also providing realtime rich 3D maps, live meeting space availability and wayfinding to points of interest.
- **Cisco Board Pro** - an all-in-one collaboration device combining a digital whiteboard, video conferencing and presentation screen, also being used to display interactive the rich 3D maps.
- **Cisco Room Bar Pro** - a compact video conferencing system designed for small meeting rooms
- **Cisco Room Kit EQ** - a more flexible solution used in larger meeting rooms to integrate first and third party equipment (e.g. Shure microphones)
- **Cisco PTZ 4K** - Used in larger meeting rooms and open spaces for presenter view, allowing remote participants to feel more engaged in meetings
- **Cisco Room Navigator** - a touchscreen control panel to simplify meeting room management
- **Cisco Microphone Array** - a high-quality audio capture devices for virtual and hybrid meetings
- **Cisco Webex Desk Pro** - a 27-inch all-in-one video collaboration device designed for individual workspaces

They would provide the user-friendly, resilient video communications infrastructure that was needed and integrate seamlessly with Cisco networking security elements and environmental monitoring. Traditionally, Cisco Workspace solutions have been configured to

operate with the Webex application, which presented a challenge to ensure that it could integrate fully with Microsoft Teams. Softcat's in-house workspace team worked closely with its Cisco counterparts to rigorously test and create configuration templates to ensure smooth Microsoft Teams integration.

"We used a lot of learning gained during the Birmingham office refit," said Ian. "It provided a blueprint to help ensure that everything worked together and would deliver the performance we required. Our workspaces team collaborated with the Cisco team to correctly configure video equipment and establish onboarding protocols, and it was very much a two-way street. We were able to share knowledge with the Cisco team and they, alongside our own teams, gained valuable insight into how to optimally configure the solution for Microsoft Teams use.

We migrated from a traditional Catalyst wireless solution, to a Meraki based one ensuring a robust Wi-Fi configuration would also help us get the best out of the installed products. We put in a lot of work surveying and mapping the new building to define an optimal network configuration and ensuring Wi-Fi access points were sited in the best locations for optimal performance. A lot of thought went into defining the correct hardware. The guest wireless network was also onboarded into Cisco Spaces, allowing us to provide custom experiences for people visiting our offices.

We also took the opportunity to implement Meraki sensors across the office floorplate. Each meeting room has individual power monitoring for the TV and video conferencing equipment, alongside environment monitoring sensors giving real time information on how well our meeting room and main office space is performing. This allows our facilities team to understand if there are any improvements in air handling that can be made.

Docking stations were replaced with a single USB cable connecting to dual 24" monitors for our users, with addition of some high-performing 34-inch, ultra-wide monitors on touchdown spaces when we built out our new London office. It would help improve the user experience, reduce office clutter and eliminate multiple devices from the hardware estate."

Solution Highlights



The Benefits

This project has blazed a trail for how Softcat will approach office refurbishment in the future. Although the initial driver was ensuring that Microsoft Teams would work efficiently and provide an optimal user experience, it's delivering multiple added benefits that will make our offices safer and more productive working environments.

The integration of Cisco Workspaces solutions, in combination with an optimal Meraki Wi-Fi setup and Meraki sensors, into a single platform has the capacity to provide a wealth of useful data capable of radically transforming how office space is used, monitored and controlled.

"The solution enables us to monitor a whole range of information, from power usage to temperature and air quality, in individual rooms," said Ian. "That information can then be fed into building management systems (BMS) to control systems like air conditioning or heating. This provides an opportunity to improve services and facilities management in the future, reduce complexity around troubleshooting issues and drive down ongoing costs. It delivers the capabilities we need to improve energy management, ensure a healthy workplace and create an efficient, user-friendly office environment. It also helps ensure that we can achieve SKA rating compliance, an accreditation which is essential to assess office fit out projects for sustainability good practice."

The integrated solution provides wayfinding assistance through 3D mapping and touchscreens to help users quickly and easily find their way around the building and rapidly familiarise themselves with emergency exits to improve safety. The solution also enables users to quickly and simply book and then find available meeting rooms. "From the outset, we believed this project would create a blueprint for future workspace configuration," said Ian. "We're confident that we've defined a standard set of requirements capable of improving the office environment, making it easier to estimate costs and delivering the data needed to gather important insights around building performance for effective facilities management. The project has provided an opportunity for third-party providers and various teams within Softcat to collaborate effectively and showcase the art of the possible."

Benefits at a Glance



Why softcat and Cisco

"The wide-ranging capabilities provided by the Cisco Workspace and Meraki solutions has enabled us to redefine how a well-designed, high-functioning office space works. Of course, there are other providers that can deliver similar technologies, but the Cisco solution delivers the functionality and cross-platform integration capacity needed for this type of implementation." said Ian.

"It illustrates our commitment to understanding how the very latest technologies can be leveraged to deliver multiple benefits and enhance the work environment. But more importantly, I firmly believe it illustrates how Softcat gains the real-world experience, deep insight and hands-on knowledge needed to deliver similar benefits to both existing and prospective clients in the future."