

## CASE STUDY: VIRGIN TRAINS SMARTER WORKING

Smarter Working delivers a  
transformational IT experience

### THE CUSTOMER

Virgin Trains had long focused on the exceptional delivery of customer service using technology, whilst unwittingly missing the opportunity to apply the same thinking to progress technology within the workplace. Consequently, internal systems were failing to keep pace with the needs of their users, with restricted access, old versions of software and limited app choices all impacting the user experience and productivity.

Virgin Trains has operated the West Coast Main Line franchise since 1997. Operating high speed train services between London and Scotland, today more than 35 million passengers choose to travel with them every year.



#### At a Glance

##### Industry

UK Rail Operator

##### Key Challenges

End-user computing systems were no longer fit for a largely mobile workforce, significantly impacting staff productivity.

##### The Solution

- Migration to Office 365 for email and productivity apps
- Deployed Box for file sharing
- Azure Active Directory implemented for identity and access management

##### Results

- Highly accessible systems enable access to apps and data from any device
- Real-time collaborative working across teams, departments and locations
- New levels of reliability
- Dramatic drop in end-user support issues
- Enabled big strides towards self-service IT for users

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**Dean Underwood**  
Head of IT Services, Virgin Trains

## THE CHALLENGE

Following an employee survey, Virgin Trains discovered what staff really thought of their IT experience, with one acute issue being mobile access to services.

As users needed to either be connected to the corporate network or the VPN, it was a constant challenge to work whilst on-the-go. With only approximately 1,000 of Virgin Trains' 3,600 employees office-based, this was a huge obstacle to productivity.

Email in particular was proving a real bugbear for staff, with performance and small mailboxes topping the list. The outsourced service to run email meant punitive

costs and expensive fixes. Furthermore, centralised email archiving did not exist, creating cumbersome localised data stores.

Revelations that many remote employees did not have their own individual digital identities also highlighted a blind spot amongst the user population.

Despite IT policies, rogue services were appearing for tools like instant messaging – clear evidence that users were seeking out new ways to collaborate in attempts to overcome the limited technologies at their disposal.

Virgin Trains also felt their ability to tackle issues was being hampered by poor visibility into both the systems and their user connectivity. Not only that, the systems responsible for key services had experienced little innovation since their original commission.

It was no surprise that many of these issues coincided with the need for upgrades, namely within the email environment and refresh of legacy Microsoft Office apps.

Both represented substantial investment to modernise, if on-premise delivery continued. With an appetite to depart from large and costly cyclical projects, Virgin Trains was sure there was a better way.



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## THE SOLUTION

It was time to shake up and modernise workforce systems. Dubbed the “Smarter Working Project” Virgin Trains planned to re-examine the tools, processes and consumption models behind the provision of IT to its users, to enable smarter and more efficient working. At its heart were the critical apps that users rely on, namely email, office productivity and collaboration tools. Also at the forefront was a desire to achieve an end-user computing environment closely aligned to a consumer-IT experience, where users could be more self-sufficient and genuinely trust in IT services.

Virgin Trains approached long-time partner, Spherica, to deliver the project, seeking help to evaluate workforce systems and the operational implications of a new platform. In particular, Virgin Trains needed the user experience to be easy and reliable, ideally driven by single sign-on access to everything.

Spherica organised sessions with different technology vendors to identify which offerings would best suit the goals of “Smarter Working”. Following review, a recommendation was made to migrate to Microsoft Office 365. In one service, several of Virgin Trains’ issues would be satisfied; modern email delivered to strict SLAs, the latest apps always available to users and dramatically simplified mobile access thanks to browser-based connectivity.

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Building the future platform around Office 365 meant Virgin Trains would overcome the CAPEX headaches of periodic technology refreshes, the software-as-a-service approach instead allowing for the platform to be funded on a pay-as-you-go basis.

To achieve single sign-on, Spherica recommended that identity and access for applications be managed in the cloud through Microsoft Azure Active Directory. Essentially the ‘glue’ that would bring the solution together, Azure Active Directory could also be used to bring single sign-on to other non-Microsoft cloud services, or on-premise services that Virgin Trains might choose to use in the future.

Through the review process, Spherica was influential in helping Virgin Trains choose Box; an alternative file sharing service. It would ensure staff could truly access everything, everywhere and being delivered through the cloud, Azure Active Directory was able to extend the identity and access capabilities into this third-party service.

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**Dean Underwood**  
Head of IT Services, Virgin Trains



## THE RESULT

Virgin Trains staff now benefit from an end-user platform designed for a mobile workforce, where everyone is identified as a digital user.

Using Office 365, users now have access to the latest suite of applications from any device, allowing teams to collaborate in new ways and enabling the business to communicate with its staff through new channels.

Together, Spherica and Virgin Trains have advanced single sign-on to create a new workspace portal that uses permissions to share applications with users, even those outside of Office 365.

Deploying services through the cloud in this way has made administration of systems significantly easier and freed up time, money and resource. Incredibly, the change of systems has not prompted the client estate to be refreshed, helping to avoid another sizeable cost. Instead, Virgin Trains can continue with their current devices and refresh them on an ongoing basis.

Critically, the business experienced minimal impact to productivity during implementation, and in post-project surveys the new services are scoring an average 8 out of 10 among users.

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*first-time users are trusting in IT and using something that just works”, says Dean Underwood, Head of IT Services.*

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*“Making applications available to users based on their identity means we’ve been able to empower them to access what they need, when they need it. It’s a huge step towards the self-service model we were looking for and users have really responded to this new freedom”, concludes Underwood.*

*“When we approached Spherica, it was a really easy decision for us. They are technically excellent and have a fantastic work ethic. We don’t see a Spherica badge – we see an extension of our IT team and that has real value. The honesty that you get from working with them is a very real thing and I know what’s best for me as a customer is always top of their mind”.*

**Dean Underwood**  
Head of IT Services, Virgin Trains



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