

Oldham to become a Wireless City?

Case Study: Unity ICT Implement Wireless Connectivity

Unity continues to receive requests for wireless connectivity in Oldham Civic Centre and surrounding buildings and have developed a proposal to make the Oldham town centre a wireless 'hot-spot' that can be extended as demand dictates. The desire to improve customer service to Councillors, visitors and staff is driving the requirement for wireless connectivity to keep people connected whilst on the move in Oldham.

Background

Wireless networking is used to meet many needs but the most common use is to connect laptop users who travel from location to location. However, many different devices can be used over a wireless network. These include laptop computers, cellular phones, Blackberry devices, and handheld computers.

Wireless networking can be installed to overcome different issues and once implemented the wireless router sends the signals to the remote server which bounces signals back so that connection can be made for the wireless internet service without the need for cables.

The Problem

The desire to implement wireless connectivity has been triggered by different requestors and for varying reasons across the Council. Drivers behind this on-going development include:

- Prohibitive expense of a wired / cabled connection

- Physical restrictions prevent laying of cables
- Business requiring a backup communications link in case of normal network failure
- A need to link portable or temporary workstations
- Long timescales waiting for cabling supplier

However, the trigger is not always related to a problem but a desire to simply provide improved services to Oldham councilors, staff and visitors to Council premises or to the general public to provide them with mobility of working, in for example Council Chambers, shown below.



The Solution

As technology changes, wireless solutions continuously change. Wireless antennae are now smaller and more discreet and in areas such as the newly refurbished Rochdale Road Reception, the aesthetics were an important consideration. Some older antennae can be quite obtrusive but the intention within the reception area was to implement a solution to blend with the new décor. As a result, Unity ICT works continuously to explore and exploit emerging technology.

Current Status

Oldham Council has made good inroads into wireless connectivity within the Civic Centre and surrounding buildings for both internal users and for Oldham's partners. Some of these wireless access points are as follows:

- Central locations such as the Council Chambers, the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Rochdale Road Reception and the VIP Centre have all been given wireless capability and are well utilised.
- Life Long Learning centres, schools and park offices have also reaped the benefits of wireless for functional reasons or where cabling is not a feasible option.
- Partners such as First Choice Homes and Greater Manchester Waste Authority are also utilising Unity's expertise in this area.

Each case for wireless connectivity is reviewed on its own merits to determine the best possible value added solution to fit the individual circumstances. Pictured below in the new reception area, left to right are Peter Brown (Project Officer), Matt Wilson (Head of Network and Security) and Kevin Clarke (Network Manager) all from Unity ICT and who between them are responsible for these developments.



Unity works collaboratively to support the Council in designing and operating with 3rd parties to implement

a wireless service and to support the infrastructure once in place.

The Benefits

Wireless technology allows people to use their equipment without the hassles of cable connected devices whilst eliminating the issues noted earlier. To the end user the benefits vary and include:

- Increased mobility for Councillors and staff
- Accessibility for visiting consultants and the public
- Ability to work from laptops in meetings reducing demands on paper documents.
- Visitors to public places such as the Queen Elizabeth Hall have access to the internet for presentations and communications

Generally for the business user, wireless connectivity means that they are no longer chained to a desk and can network with colleagues from anywhere, at any time and in any place, check email, keep up with the news, check the weather, make travel plans and generally conduct their business. Oldham Council already has plans to extend wireless connectivity and is in discussion with Unity about providing wireless connectivity within Oldham town centre. This will further enhance the services it offers to the general public, local businesses and visitors alike.

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ICT Department

'.....The ICT division has made many improvements, and we plan to continue to improve the services we deliver in Oldham and for other customers.'
- Trevor Slade (Unity ICT Services Director)

In Partnership with Oldham Council