



Windows 7 Customer Solution Case Study



Overview

Country or Region: UK

Industry: IT Services

Partner Profile

NCI Technologies is one of the leading IT service companies in the UK, servicing the small and medium business market throughout south west of England.

Business Situation

NCI had been hearing from its clients that the pace of their businesses had begun to slow significantly. The resources employees were using on a daily basis were dispersed across their networks and had become difficult to efficiently search for and access. Also, NCI's consultants, working remotely at client companies most of the time, were finding it challenging to remain productive when behind client firewalls.

Solution

By deploying the Windows® 7 operating system, NCI cost-effectively boosted its clients' speed of business through enhanced search and better organization and presentation of information. The company also enabled its own staff to have easy, secure network connectivity, and better capability to work longer without having to search out a power source.

Benefits

- 25% overall improvement in time customers spend performing everyday tasks
- ~35% rise in consultant productivity
- ~30% rise in battery life

NCI Technologies Boosts Customer Productivity by over 35% with Windows® 7 Search Enhancements

“Windows 7 has truly given our customers’ desktop computers a new lease of life!”

Andy Trish, Managing Director, NCI

Based in Penryn, Cornwall, with satellite offices in Plymouth and Newton Abbott, NCI Technologies is one of the leading IT service companies in the UK, servicing the small and medium business markets. A Microsoft® Gold Partner, NCI had been hearing from its clients that their pace of business had begun to slow significantly. While a full hardware upgrade could resolve the situation, NCI's clients did not have a big budget.

In addition, NCI also needed to address an internal challenge. The company's consultants, working remotely at client companies most of the time, were finding it challenging to remain productive when behind client firewalls, due to access issues.

By deploying the Windows® 7 operating system, NCI cost-effectively boosted its clients' speed of business and enabled its own staff to have easier and more secure network connectivity.



“Our customers were suffering from delays at every turn. We needed to find a cost-effective solution that would enable them to meet and exceed their business goals, and remain competitive.”

Neil Crowther, Systems Engineer, NCI

Situation

The employees at NCI's client companies were constantly being slowed down as they performed their everyday core business tasks. Essential files and applications were dispersed across the network and difficult to locate quickly. There was also no way to view all the various files and applications related to a specific task or project all at once.

Essentially, the speed at which NCI's clients could conduct business was being severely limited by legacy hardware and other systems that would be expensive to replace or upgrade. According to Neil Crowther, Systems Engineer at NCI, “Our customers were suffering from delays at every turn. We needed to find a cost-effective solution that would enable them to meet and exceed their business goals, and remain competitive.”

NCI's consultants spend a majority of their time on the field, visiting client sites. They focus on maintaining clients' network infrastructure and designing and deploying new solutions that support their customers' strategic business goals. Working remotely is an integral part of a consultant's job, but it is not without problems.

Many of NCI's clients need to protect sensitive customer data when consultants are coming in and out – and especially when they are accessing the network. Says Andy Trish, Managing Director at NCI, “Navigating VPNs has always been extremely challenging; it's difficult and time-consuming for our consultants to toggle between public and private networks when working on site.” Add to this the amount of downtime incurred when consultants have to locate and map to a new network printer – often multiple times each day—and productivity takes a serious hit. And adding to this problem are laptop batteries that cannot support a consultant who works long hours without ready access to a power source.

NCI knew it needed to find a cost-effective way to speed up search, access, and organization of business-critical files and applications for its clientele, while leveraging their existing hardware investments. It also had to find a way to help its own consultants to easily alternate between private and public data when working remotely, protecting clients' sensitive customer data without adding an additional layer of network security to the infrastructure. It also needed to extend laptop battery life for consultants working without access to a consistent power supply. Could these seemingly diverse issues have a common solution?

The Windows 7 Solution

NCI found the solution it was looking for in Windows 7, the latest release of the popular Windows operating system (OS). Windows 7 can simplify and automate routine tasks, help users respond more quickly to customer requests, and help safeguard against malware and other threats that can slow down or stop the pace of business.

Deploying Windows 7 on existing hardware enables organizations to cost-effectively provide better access to the files and applications that employees use every day. Staff can instantly locate the customer records, emails, or applications they need, so they spend less time searching, and more time doing business. It also empowers users to automatically group similar types of documents, such as financial records or customer lists, into easy-to-find “Libraries.” And simply mousing over the task bar or an application icon produces a list of recently used items. The simple, intuitive interface also lets users arrange windows side-by-side, and minimize or maximize windows with just a keystroke or a mouse gesture.

Windows 7 enables users to improve productivity by allowing them to connect quickly and securely from anywhere to either

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Neil Crowther, Systems Engineer, NCI

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Neil Crowther, Systems Engineer, NCI

wired or wireless business networks, and detect and map to local printers and projectors, maintaining those connections as they move from place to place. It's also faster and easier to share documents and other resources across multiple Windows 7 Professional PCs—even without a network server.

Benefits

Improved Access

Crowther says that the enhanced search features of Windows 7 have made a big difference for NCI's clients. “The new search capabilities in Windows 7 have completely eliminated the need for third-party search options,” he states. “Our clients tell us that they can now quickly locate and access all the files and applications they need in order to keep their businesses moving forward.”

Using Instant Search, NCI's clients benefit from new, deeper search capabilities that essentially make Windows 7 a search engine unto itself. Says Trish, “The ability to search for files across local PCs, the Internet, and all the way down to the command level has really added immeasurable value.” Users can also take advantage of Windows 7 Jump Lists, which enable them to see recently used files by simply right-clicking on a taskbar icon. Once they have located the files they need, Windows 7 lets NCI's clients organize them into Libraries, which provide a unified view of all resources associated with a specific project.

Another Windows 7 tool for organizing files is Aero Enhancements, which enable users to configure and re-configure the way they view information on their desktops. The Snap functionality provides side-by-side views of windows. By hovering over an icon on the task bar, users can invoke Peek, which makes all windows transparent to allow views of the desktop. Using Shake makes all

background windows go away; use Shake again, and they reappear. “I usually have at least 10 windows open on my desktop, and I never know where anything is,” says Crowther. “Using the Peek function of the Windows Aero Enhancements, I just hover over the icons and instantly see what is there—it's so much faster than trying to toggle back and forth!”

Better Productivity

From a productivity standpoint, NCI's consultants have reaped enormous benefits from Windows 7. The Network Connection Wizard has given them easier desktop connections to wireless and cell networks, VPNs, and printer resources. “Being able to connect to any kind of network quickly and easily has really improved my productivity in the field,” states Crowther. “I no longer have to spend hours each week searching for resources every time I move to a new location.”

According to Trish, the new power management feature of Windows 7 is a real improvement for mobile users. “Smart Network Power automatically turns off the parts of your PC that you don't need, saving power without affecting performance,” he says. “This provides a significant boost in battery life, which really makes a difference for consultants who sometimes have to work for hours without a power source.”

Leveraging Technology Investments

The best part of Windows 7, according to Trish, is the fact that it enables NCI's clients to get more mileage out of their existing hardware. Before, NCI's best solution for improving search and file access for its clients would have been to recommend a total hardware upgrade. In the small business market, a project like this would likely have to be delayed due to the upfront expense. With Windows 7, NCI is now able to deploy a cost-effective operating system upgrade that

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resolves file search, access, and organization issues, and opens up a new revenue stream with clients upgrading from older operating systems.

Windows 7 also offers backward compatibility with Windows XP. Designed to work with a wide range of applications, devices, and online services, it's now possible for NCI's customers to run many existing Windows XP programs seamlessly, right from the Windows 7 desktop. "Our clients take comfort in the fact that any possible compatibility issues have been fully anticipated and addressed by having the backup of utilizing Virtual XP Mode if they need it," says Trish. "And the ease of use of the programs installed through XP mode saves time and frustration."

Steven Sinofsky, Senior Vice President of the Windows and Windows Live Engineering Group, says that this is just the beginning of the Windows 7 opportunity for partners. According to Sinofsky, "We now have a great foundation for our partners to start learning and innovating on this exciting new version of Windows." Trish agrees. He says, "Windows 7 has truly given our customers' desktop computers a new lease on life!"

Windows 7

Faster and more reliable: Windows 7 will help your organization use information technology to gain a competitive advantage in today's new world of work. Your people will be able to be more productive anyway. You will be able to support your mobile work force with better access to shared data and collaboration tools. And your IT staff will have better tools and technologies to enhance corporate IT security, data protection, and more efficient deployment and management.

For more information about Windows 7, go to: www.microsoft.com/windows/business

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Document published June 2009

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