

Case Study



CAD Helpdesk service provision

The achievement

The provision of a CAD Helpdesk Service by London Underground Limited's Engineering Information Services' CAD Administration Team in close working partnership with successive third party service providers – first with EDS under an extension to an existing PFI agreement, and then with ITNET under a services only agreement. The challenge was to ensure that users continued to benefit from the LUL's CAD administrator's expertise and LUL remained in control of the quality of the services provided.

This case study is of benefit to any firm interested in the provision of helpdesk support services, and to firms interested in outsourcing the provision of CAD hardware, software and services generally.

Key benefits of using IT to provide a CAD Helpdesk

- ★ The provision of a clear focal point for CAD support services and an enhanced interface between users and support staff
- ★ The generation of statistics that are useful for trend analysis
- ★ The preservation of records of how problems are dealt within a useful knowledge base.

The background

LUL has used Computer Aided Design (CAD) software and hardware for over 15 years and has a large investment in drawing data in Microstation format. While continuing to use Microstation as its core CAD software, LUL has moved from UNIX to Microsoft Windows NT as the operating system for workstations and servers.

LUL procures hardware, software and services from approved suppliers and also contracts with those suppliers and other third parties for maintenance and support.

In 1994, when LUL Engineering Directorate staff moved to Canary Wharf, EDS was awarded a five year private finance initiative (PFI) contract to supply desktop services for 1500 desktops distributed over seven floors at Canary Wharf. The computing infrastructure was based on Windows NT servers and Windows for Workgroups clients, which have since been upgraded to Windows 95. Under the PFI contract, hardware and software licenses associated with the desktop services remained vested with EDS, but provision was made for access to applications not supplied or supported by EDS.

Until 1998, CAD services were delivered independently of the EDS contract by LUL Engineering Information Services (LUL EIS) via a separate segment of the network using dedicated workstations and servers. This arrangement was undesirable as CAD users required separate desktop clients to access CAD and office automation applications and therefore incurred higher maintenance, support and space charges.

It was decided that the contract with EDS could be extended to include the provision of CAD equipment, system support and CAD Help Desk services. However, CAD application support services should be delivered to LUL end-users under 'back-to-back' service level agreements between EDS and LUL EIS, and LUL EIS and LUL business units. In this way, a common focal point for all support calls could be established, but calls requiring specialist CAD expertise would be referred to LUL EIS CAD administrators.

The approach

The challenge was to find the best way of delivering the required CAD helpdesk services. A procedure to govern the joint provision of a CAD helpdesk had to be agreed by LUL EIS, EDS, and representatives of the LUL CAD user community. Brian Watt, LUL CAD Manager, was designated as the Support Manager for LUL. Working with a designated EDS Support Manager and others, he agreed a set of working practices that was then published as a CAD helpdesk procedure document. The document deals with the categorization of calls, call handling, reporting procedures, and the collation of call statistics, etc.

When the contract with EDS lapsed, LUL entered into a contract with ITNET for the provision services only, and ITNET agreed to adhere to the terms embodied in the helpdesk procedure document. LUL chose not to dictate the helpdesk software used by either EDS or ITNET. EDS elected to use Computer Associated Unicenter Advanced Helpdesk software; ITNET subsequently chose to use Remedy Help Desk. Essentially, ITNET staff man the helpdesk system and provide general system support, but inquiries relating to CAD applications are passed on to LUL EIS CAD administrators. At peak times, two to three LUL EIS CAD administrators are needed to handle CAD related calls.

When the new CAD helpdesk was first implemented, the LUL EIS CAD administrators disliked the system because it forced them to respond to queries within set periods of time. They grew more positive as they perceived the benefits of the system as a repository of useful information.

Benefits achieved

- The helpdesk provides a clear focal point for the provision of CAD support services, and an enhanced interface between users and support staff
- LUL EIS and its clients obtain statistics which provide useful early warning of problems
- The helpdesk system preserves records of how past problems were dealt with. Over time, these records have become a useful knowledge base.

Key lessons

- ✦ It is important to establish and maintain good relations with service providers. LUL CAD Manager, Brian Watt, stresses that if a client must fall back on the performance metrics in a SLA, the relationship with the service provider has failed.
- ✦ Hard statistics on system usage are much more convincing than assertions.
- ✦ It is important that an organisation gives early thought to the procedures that will govern a helpdesk, the classification of helpdesk calls, and the manner in which calls should be dealt with and reported on.

Further information

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This is a summary of one of a number of case studies on the application of IT in construction produced by the Building Research Establishment and the Construction Industry Computing Association under the Partners in Innovation initiative. For a more detailed version of this case study contact The BRE Centre for Construction IT on Tel 01923 664842 or CICA on Tel 01223 236336.



The *IT Construction Best Practice* programme identifies, publicises and supports the use of IT to improve business and management practices for the construction industry. It is funded by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and is an initiative within the Construction Best Practice programme, steered jointly by government and the Construction Industry Board.

