

# Unicorn Group keeps communication flowing with help from IBM messaging experts Thomas Norton Consultants

## Overview

### Customer challenge

Unicorn Group manufactures and distributes a range of world-renowned sports goods. Relying on e-mail to communicate within the Group and with its international business partners, the company needs a top-class support partner for its LotusDomino® Express™ messaging infrastructure.

### Solution

IBM messaging experts Thomas Norton Consultants provide cost-effective, responsive second and third level support. The company keeps the messaging solution aligned to business needs through regular reviews, which recommend infrastructure improvements and potential developments.

### Customer benefits

- Number of support calls down 15%
- Training of internal “super user” frees support service to concentrate on adding business value
- Cost effective access to deep expertise
- Regular reviews keep system effective and aligned to business needs
- Greater awareness of Lotus Notes® capabilities and developments
- Responsive, trusted service brings peace of mind.



Established by the current Managing Director's grandfather in the 1920s, the Unicorn Group is a family business responsible for the manufacture and distribution of some of the best-known premium sports brands in the world. Selling in over 80 countries, principal products include Unicorn darts, Gunn & Moore cricket bats and PowerGlide snooker and pool cues.

With around 70 employees, the Unicorn Group has its headquarters in Kent and a manufacturing plant in Nottingham that not only produces Gunn & Moore cricket bats but also provides warehousing for goods produced by the entire Unicorn Group of companies. Manufacture of Unicorn darts was moved to China around 10 years ago and the manufacture of other goods has been outsourced to Pakistan and India.

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– Edward Lowy, Managing Director at Unicorn Group

Built on



offerings



As with most organisations today, e-mail has become a vital element in Unicorn's day-to-day functions. It enables quick and easy communication with colleagues, business partners and customers whatever their geographic location. "We've had an IBM Lotus Domino Express solution for almost ten years and it's proved to be very robust and easy to maintain. However, with a growing business and no dedicated in-house IT resource, it's vital that we have a support partner we can trust," says Edward Lowy, Managing Director at Unicorn Group. "We're still, essentially, a family business. What we like about Thomas Norton Consultants is that they're big enough to cope but small enough to give us the level of personalised service we require at a cost-effective price."

Nick Norton, Technical Director at Thomas Norton Consultants comments: "One of the main advantages of the IBM Express Advantage offering is that it enables small and medium sized enterprises to gain access to world-class IBM solutions while working with knowledgeable IBM Business Partners who really understand the SME viewpoint."

### **Second and third level support**

For more than 3 years, Thomas Norton Consultants has provided second and third level support for Unicorn's messaging solution backed by contractually defined Service Level Agreements. Based on version 7 of Lotus Notes, Unicorn has a messaging infrastructure that spreads between its Kent head office and its Nottingham manufacturing plant with a server at each site and around 40 regular users of Lotus Notes. Remote access enables Thomas Norton to monitor the system and carry out maintenance and reconfiguration.

Lowy is Unicorn's Lotus Notes "super user" and, with help from his Personal Assistant, deals with all first level support issues. Norton explains: "The training of "super users" is part of our standard service. We make sure they're able to manage the key areas of user registration, mailbox administration and user polices – reducing their reliance on our support service and freeing us to concentrate on the issues that add most business value." Lowy says: "If we have a problem our contacts at Thomas Norton have demonstrated that they can get us back up and running quickly. They're responsive and are a wonderful source of knowledge and advice about Lotus Notes or Domino. Knowing they're there gives me valuable peace of mind."

### **Closely aligned to the business**

Thomas Norton holds a support service review with Unicorn every six months. The records of all support calls received in the previous period are examined and, if a troublesome area is identified, an assessment is carried out to identify how the situation might be improved. This may involve additional user training, reconfiguration or even upgrades or improvements to the messaging infrastructure.

These reviews, coupled with the “super user” training have led to a 15% fall in the number of support calls to Thomas Norton in the last two years. The reviews also provide an ideal opportunity to ensure that Unicorn is getting the maximum business value from its messaging solution by considering appropriate new developments. IBM Lotus Sametime® was introduced, for example, to enable staff in Nottingham to collaborate in realtime with their colleagues in Kent.

### **A partnership approach**

Lowy says: “Thomas Norton takes a proactive partnership approach to its support service, working in conjunction with our other IT suppliers such as our network providers. This pre-empts problems that might occur from the inter-relationship between different products and services.”

This partnership approach has also proved invaluable when investigating issues such as mail routing problems between Unicorn and its many business partners around the world whom may use messaging solutions that are not based on IBM Lotus Notes.

### **Specialist advice for the future**

As an IBM Business Partner, Thomas Norton is up-to-date with the latest developments in the IBM Lotus Domino Express solution and is able to make Unicorn aware of new releases that may be of benefit to its business.

Lowy says: “We’re already interested in moving to version 8 of IBM Lotus Notes and our contacts at Thomas Norton have explained how they believe our Research and Development management process, which is largely e-mail- and paper-based at the moment, would benefit from the implementation of collaboration tools such as IBM Lotus Quickr™. When you’ve got a business to run it’s invaluable to have support partners that are keeping you up to speed with the latest IT developments and how they might add value to your own particular situation.”

### **For more information**

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