

# Cocentra increases the benefit of its ‘Excellence Chain’ with help from IBM and Commerce-Connections

## Overview

### Customer challenge

As a support and advice organisation, Cocentra relies on the combined expertise of its permanent employees and experienced associates. The company needed to find a cost-effective, simple to use, scalable solution to help a diverse group of specialists, working across the UK, collaborate effectively on a range of projects.

### Solution

IBM Business Partner Commerce-Connections hosts, manages and supports an IBM Lotus® Domino® Collaboration Express solution for Cocentra. For the last five years, this resilient, scalable solution has provided Cocentra with enterprise level collaboration tools at an affordable price.

### Customer benefits

- Improved service to clients
- Increased productivity
- Cost-effective
- 24/7 system management and access to expertise
- Reliable and scalable
- Connection available through a web browser
- Reduced need to travel.



Formed in 2002, Cocentra Limited is a leading independent company working in the Children’s Services sector. With an emphasis on education, Cocentra is a major contributor to the UK government’s Building Schools for the Future initiative – the biggest ever school buildings investment programme. The company’s services include the provision of courses, stakeholder questionnaires, In Service Training (INSET), interim management and publications.

Cocentra employs around 30 people on a permanent basis and, in order to provide a broad range of expert support, also works with specialised and experienced associates - referred to as ‘The Excellence Chain’. With employees travelling around the UK working on projects for a variety of clients and Cocentra associates frequently based at home or their own offices, the company must facilitate easy contact and collaboration for everyone working on its assignments.

*“Commerce-Connections is very straightforward to work with and our contacts are always extremely helpful and responsive whether we approach them with general questions or a potential issue.”*

– Robert Parry, Business Manager at Cocentra

Built on



offerings



Andrew Best, Director at Cocentra explains: "As well as email, we need efficient shared access to stored documents and databases. When a group of people is putting together a bid or working on a project, effective document version control is crucial. It's also important to be able to track and trace all related correspondence. When Cocentra was first formed we wanted a cost-effective solution that would grow with us as we expanded.

Having met with various suppliers, IBM Lotus Domino Express™ software was the only option we found that provided the facilities we required at an affordable price. As a small company, hosting our solution with Lotus Domino experts like Commerce-Connections made far more financial sense than trying to employ and retain our own System Administrator."

**Expert, responsive support**

Cocentra already owned two Linux servers so these were moved to Commerce-Connections' data centre where IBM Lotus Domino Collaboration Express was installed. Cocentra also uses Lotus Domino Designer to help build and deploy secure, collaborative databases.

Lawrence Geung, Director at Commerce-Connections says: "With IBM Lotus Domino Express solutions, per user licensing includes both server and client software. This opens the door to enterprise level solutions for smaller businesses by making them simple and cost-effective to acquire."

Robert Parry, Business Manager at Cocentra comments: "IBM Lotus Domino Express gives us functionality you'd expect to pay much more for. I've previously worked for a large organisation that uses IBM Lotus Notes® and it's surprising to see how much of the functionality is provided in a similar way. A further benefit is that getting to grips with things like managing databases is pretty simple. I've had to learn quickly without any formal training and have found it straightforward."

By hosting its solution with Commerce-Connections, Cocentra gains access to high network bandwidth. This is particularly advantageous for associates as it offers fast, reliable access to Lotus Domino applications through a web browser.

Cocentra has a technical support and maintenance contract with Commerce-Connections providing first and second level support. Parry says: "I'm the only person working on IT at Cocentra and the hosting and management service provided by Commerce-Connections frees up my time to concentrate on other business-oriented projects. I joined Cocentra 18 months ago and my first few months in post were made much easier by having experts available at the end of the phone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Commerce-Connections is very straightforward to work with and our contacts are always extremely helpful and responsive whether we approach them with general questions or a potential issue."

### **Increased productivity, improved service**

Having efficient collaboration tools helps Cocentra employees and associates work more effectively together and ultimately deliver better products and service to clients. If five or six people are working on a project - no matter where they are located geographically - it is easy to refer them to a database or drop them an email with a link into a relevant document. Documents and databases can be accessed and updated as required and, at any point in time, all members of the team can see what progress has been made and the status of the project.

“We frequently conduct surveys for schools,” says Parry. “Tracking how the survey has progressed is much easier when you have Lotus Domino supporting it. People can share work and contribute help and advice as a project unfolds. When we’re putting together a bid document for a project people at opposite ends of the country can work on the same version together. It keeps the process moving and, thanks to version control, it’s far more efficient than emailing copies of files around which can easily get out of synch. Lotus Domino can also cut down on people’s need to travel - it definitely helps us collaborate more productively.”

### **Growing with the business**

When Cocentra first began working with Commerce-Connections, it had eight Lotus Domino users. Today there are around 40 including associates. The Lotus Domino Collaboration Express solution has easily coped with this increase in demand.

Looking to the future Cocentra is considering improving people’s access to emails even further by implementing the Blackberry Enterprise Service. “When people are travelling they may not be able to connect to the Internet,” explains Parry. “If everyone had a Blackberry device linked to a server that updated emails and calendars in virtual realtime they could still access up-to-the-minute information, enabling them to be more responsive to our clients. As part of this progression to mobile solutions we are also considering upgrading our servers, which are reaching the end of their life, and moving to Lotus Notes Domino 8. Our contacts at Commerce-Connections have spent a long time investigating our options and the associated costs. Having help like this is invaluable to us.”

### **For more information**

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*– Lawrence Geung, Director at Commerce-Connections*



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