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universal housing
enabling service delivery

Heading for business graphic



The start of the story

As you will know, the ancestors of housing provision were compelled to counter the overcrowding, poverty and squalor experienced during the Industrial Revolution. Thousands of people were drawn into the towns by the prospect of work and, as these communities gathered and grew, so did their need for decent accommodation, giving birth to the social housing movement.

Years later, many people see housing as just another public service, similar perhaps to the benefits office or social services. But let's just think about it for a second, if your benefits or childcare vouchers are delayed for a few days, what's the worst that can happen? Some inconvenience yes, or minor hassle maybe. But for those who need accommodation, the provision of a roof over their heads makes housing the most important service of all.

Our story began over twenty years ago, just as the technological revolution was gathering pace. We recognised that such a vital service needed to be supported by IT solutions that would not only streamline the process of housing management, but would provide a stable foundation for the organisation to develop as things change.

Our advanced IT systems have been constantly evolving from those early days. We have developed solutions that are both usable and useful by:

- Listening** We take great care to maintain close, mutually beneficial partnerships with our customers.
- Learning** We apply our vast experience of the sector to develop solutions that are fit for your purposes.
- Looking** We are always prepared to face the challenge of adopting new technologies in sensible, practical ways and flexible enough to deal with legislative changes.

Comino – what's the story?

- Over 350 customers within the housing sector and Local Government.
- Over 1 Million properties across the UK are managed with Comino solutions.
- Recognised as the leading supplier of IT solutions to RSL's and Local Government.



"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor is it the most intelligent: it is the one that is most adaptable to change."

charles robert darwin 1809-82
British naturalist, author of the theory of evolution based on natural selection

Evolve at your own rate

Corporate fitness – adapting to a quicker pace

Looking back a few years, things always seem to be so much simpler than today. Your customers were limited in the ways that they could get in touch. But when they did, things became complicated; interactions were almost always a protracted, reactive affair.

At that time housing organisations would use basic systems that merely stored, retrieved and displayed data. It was at this time we entered the market. Decades later, we still supply and support the hugely popular transactional systems for which we have become renowned, but the pace of social, legislative and technological change has quickened, forcing the sector to adapt just to keep up, never mind getting ahead.

Faster response, higher service levels, stronger processes.

This quickening tempo triggered the drive to provide a better, more efficient service to match your customers' expectations whilst attaining best value. For most, this meant change, a move towards being a more agile, more responsive organisation. In the light of this new dawn, we have used our expertise in workflow and electronic document management to produce a range of front office systems that can help you get up to speed.

Of course, getting fit can be a challenge. You wouldn't expect to sprint on the treadmill for an hour the first time you go down to the gym; that approach can really hurt. We think that you should choose the pace of change that suits your organisation, which is why we have built in flexibility and ability to integrate within all our systems so you only need to implement the tools you require to achieve corporate fitness.



The IT people we speak to within housing like the idea of Universal Housing. They like the fact that implementing strategic changes in the way they work does not mean implementing a whole new system, just the solutions they need.

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WORKFLOW AND ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT

The difference between data and information

It is clear that, if service provision is to be transformed, systems that merely locate and present data are no longer good enough. When your customers want answers, sifting through screens of data to find what you need is not an option.

Workflow is the key to streamlining your internal processes. Much more than a series of tick boxes, true workflow guides and prompts the user through the whole process from start to finish, providing exactly the information needed at each stage, in order that the process can be completed. Once started, a process cannot be lost, mislaid or forgotten about, meaning that your customers experience a much more consistent service, leading to greater satisfaction.

Don't misunderstand what this means. We don't want to force you into working 'our' way; rather, we want to understand your processes and fit our solutions to the way you work.

Enhance your performance

Nothing will help you achieve efficiencies in customer service like electronic document management. At a stroke you can cut out the daily paper chase that can take up most of the working day. Instead, you have instant access to all the documents pertaining to any customer, on hand, all the time.

Wider integration

The gradual move towards enterprise-wide customer facing solutions has challenged those IT suppliers with a departmental focus. We identified this trend early on and built into our systems the ability to scale-up and the flexibility to deliver across the whole organisation. The consequence of taking this course of action has resulted in the acquisition of a significant number of corporate clients.

CONTACT MANAGEMENT

The communication generation

Society has moved on. Triggered by the upsurge in accessible, inexpensive technology, this evolutionary leap means that if you want to accommodate the host of new communication channels that seem to open up with increasing rapidity, you will have to reassess the way you work.

Your customers expect so much more:

Corporate-wide capability – Passing your customers around different departments leads to frustration for them and confusion for you. Just get it right first time.

Corporate-wide flexibility – Your customers want to choose the channel that suits them, at a time that suits them. In this new society, an answer-phone facility after 5pm no longer constitutes an out-of-hours service.

Corporate-wide consistency – If your customers experience a consistent, coherent message across your organisation every time they get in touch, they gain a much clearer perspective of your organisation and what it is you can do for them.

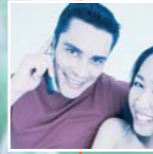
Contact Manager can deliver this. It applies your business processes to all interactions with your customers, regardless of the channel they have used to get in touch. Using our powerful workflow software, Contact Manager guides and prompts the user from the start, to the end of every process, making sure that your internal procedures are adhered to throughout.

Giving you unprecedented levels of management information, Contact Manager lets you see just how effective your front office team are and is being used by many of our clients to identify areas where service can be improved or further efficiencies gained.

Super-charge your strategy

Integrating your telephone exchange to your contact management system super-charges your customer relationship management strategy and helps you exceed your customers' expectations.

Dealing with incoming calls becomes a sleek, slick, efficient process. Costs are reduced, efficiency is boosted, the consistency and effectiveness of your service rises.



Paul and Sue are getting really excited about moving into their new home. They still can't believe that they were able to choose the house they wanted from the website; they expected to be told where they had to live, and not have the choice of browsing for a property that suits them.

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Consumers demand more choice, it's a recognised trend. Where cafés once offered a choice of just coffee or tea, you can now choose from 4 different types of coffee, served 5 different ways in 3 sizes, or one of a countless variety of herbal or fruit flavoured teas.

Responding to the groundswell of expectation from your customers and demands from Government initiatives can be complex and costly. However, the internet offers a practical, popular, cost effective channel, through which a new generation of services can be delivered.

Under pressure to deliver more

More choice

The pressure to offer greater choice in the process of housing provision has turned a lot of preconceptions upside-down. Instead of your customers being offered the next property on the list, they get to bid for the properties that suit their needs via a website or kiosk.

Universal Choice actively involves your customers in the process of choosing a property, and because they are involved, the level of refusals drop and the number of lettings rise.

More mobility

Of course, choice extends beyond just your customers. Universal Housing can open up new, flexible ways of working where your key people are not bound to their desks, but can take their 'office' along with them to where they are needed most.

More convenience

The exponential growth of the internet has been impressive. It is rapidly becoming a convenient, non-intimidating channel that fits your customers' 24/7 lifestyle.

Comino Interactive opens up a wealth of ways in which your customers can connect with you. The more mundane, repetitive processes like logging repairs, or rent queries become almost like 'self service'. This means that your staff are freed to get on with the tasks that require their expertise.

The shift in the way housing is provided requires much more than what was traditionally called 'the housing system'. We have recognised that organisations increasingly have to be run like a business and therefore need business systems in order to prosper.

Taking care of business

Take a simple concept

At first glance Affordable Housing is an uncomplicated idea. You have people who want to buy a house, but they can't afford it and you can help. Simple isn't it?

Unfortunately, implementing an Affordable Housing programme is not a straight-forward affair. Assessing applicant eligibility, marketing properties, checking keyworker status, waiting list management, conveyancing work and complying with regulatory requirements all add up to a rather daunting proposition.

Universal Property Sales is designed to enable housing organisations to implement an effective, innovative and flexible Affordable Housing programme. Workflow technology guides your staff through the complexities of every procedure, equipping your organisation for the next evolutionary step.

Take stock – are you decent?

The government has said that all social housing would be made decent by 2010. Your stock has to have decent facilities, decent heating and be in a decent state of repair. The challenge is how you keep tabs on how your stock measures up and plan the maintenance work in order to stay decent.

Our Universal Asset Management system compiles survey information against each asset to determine that property's current Decent Homes status. In addition Universal Asset Management allows you to forecast and plan future maintenance activity.

Take control of the process

Historically, the complexity of property repossession has meant either a resource-hungry internal process if you handle cases in house; or more often, a costly outsourcing exercise.

Regularly facing the risk of costly failed actions due to non-compliance can erode your confidence. Possession Manager gives you the assurance to take back control and manage the whole process from statutory notice through to possession order.

Financial Directors don't often get the chance to sit back and contemplate the big picture. Too much time is spent chasing the bits and pieces of everyday life in housing. But just imagine having greater control, better stock and more innovation. Now, less time is spent with the bits and pieces and more time on the big things.

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The foundation of our success

Strong transactional systems

The transactional system is the part of our overall solution on which our deserved status as the leading supplier to the Housing sector is built. Most RSL's in the UK and many Local Authorities use our robust transactional systems; after all, we've been supplying them for over twenty years now, so is there a new story to tell about the back office?

Flexibility, integration, independence

Our transactional system has been designed to be hugely flexible; this means that it has the inherent capability to handle the ever-increasing complexities of the sector; from traditional HA's, through to Local Authorities; large, multifaceted group structures to LSVT's and ALMO's.

This flexibility is enhanced by an unprecedented ability to integrate. Indeed, integration is the key to realising your corporate ambitions. If your front-line systems cannot achieve true integration with the transactional system in real time, it is likely that performance will be compromised. We understand how important integration is to the effectiveness of the overall solution which is why we ensured that our transactional system was designed with integration at the forefront of our thinking.

Agile finance

Now we don't want to labour the point about change, but nowhere is change felt quite as profoundly, as in the area of corporate finance.

Increasing instances of mergers, partial mergers, LSVT's and the adoption of complex group structures, all add levels of complexity that traditional accounting systems cannot adequately manage. This usually results in compromised procedures or disparate, islands of information.

Universal Housing Financial System has the agility to deal easily with the most convoluted of organisations including multi-company or multi-scheme structures. UHFS safeguards your data in one

XLR is an incredibly powerful reporting tool that gives you the dexterity to drill down, through and across your database quickly and easily within industry standard spreadsheets. This means that your management team can get all the financial management information they need, whenever they need it.

In many ways, when contemplating a new IT solution, it is the procurement process that is the exciting bit. The possibilities of what you will be able to achieve with all these new solutions seem endless.

Then, after you've signed on the dotted line, the realisation hits you. It's time to deliver.

Beyond the product

Project management and consultancy

Don't panic. Take a deep breath...and relax. You are not alone. Our hugely experienced project management team can ease the transition using logical, understandable processes and proven methodologies.

It's likely that an IT implementation means that you will be looking at new ways of working. Our team of consultants are ideally qualified to assess the way you work, determine the impact your new solution will have and make recommendations on how you can get the most out of your investment.

Partnering

Partnering is an often used phrase these days; often used, but rarely understood. Many organisations claim to be able to hold the key to some kind of supplier / customer Nirvana, but real partnering is much more than a few publicity shots of people shaking hands and a commemorative Perspex plaque.

Our unique approach to partnering has been developed with world renowned specialists who helped us understand that partnering can be great, but is certainly not a soft option. indeed, we recognise that partnering won't suit everyone. That said, many of our customers are realising the significant benefits that partnering can offer.

Training

Good training is often vital to the acceptance of any new IT system. Fortunately, our team of specialist trainers has the expertise, sector knowledge and bucketloads of enthusiasm to get your workforce using the system confidently and productively as quickly as possible.

Help Desk

Our support professionals use our own workflow and EDM based Help Desk application which enables us to offer a quick, effective, consistent response and to run a practical programme of preventative maintenance.

User Groups

A major factor behind our continued success is our emphasis on listening to our customers. Our regular programme of user group meetings and conferences helps us keep in touch with the issues facing our customers and allows us to keep our customer in touch with what's on the horizon.



Bob is a tenant's representative who would admit to being a little bit cynical sometimes. Bob anticipated that the implementation of Universal Housing would cause major service interruptions, but it was all done so smoothly that most tenants didn't even notice and now the new contact centre is up and running. Maybe, Bob thinks, maybe I shouldn't always expect the worst...

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The natural selection

Hundreds of years after the first recognisable Social Housing schemes came into being and despite all the social, technological and political transformations that have come since; the job essentially remains the same – people still need housing.

Of course, the hierarchy has shifted; public services have become businesses, the people that we used to refer to as 'tenants' or 'applicants' are now 'customers' and the customer has become king.

We understand this sector-wide sea change; many staff throughout our organisation come from a Housing background and know how important your work is. We understand the pressures you are under to deliver more choice and better service, whilst demonstrating efficiency gains.

Our response is Universal Housing, a solution that has evolved from a drawing-board concept into the only proven, robust suite of applications that has the genetic makeup and technological agility to perform, adapt and inspire in today's unpredictable times.

So why is it that, out of all the suppliers of IT to housing, only Comino has gone through the process of designing a completely new system using the very latest technology? In a word, Compromises. We really don't like them. They don't feature in our dictionary, it goes from comprise straight through to comptometer without stopping.

It's not just us though; our customers don't want to compromise, why should they? They don't want to compromise on functionality, on flexibility, on their pace of change and they certainly don't want to compromise on the way they work. Why? – Because their customers don't like compromises either.