



HOLMES GROUP ASSESSES TEAMWORK AND DIALS UP TEAMS ENTERPRISE VOICE

Kiwi engineering and design specialists Holmes Group have 15 offices across New Zealand, the US, Australia and the Netherlands, with over 500 employees.

The company's five subsidiaries - Holmes Consulting, Holmes Structures, Holmes Fire, Holmes Solutions and Holmes Farsight - operate independently providing a broad range of engineering services but work collaboratively under the Holmes Group banner.

Situation

Holmes Group has been on a deliberate and well-considered IT journey. In 2017 the company, which was already using Microsoft Office 365, formalised its digital strategy and with the help of trusted IT advisor Lexel Systems, made the move to a new modern workplace experience by implementing Microsoft SharePoint Online.

Sam Mulholland, Holmes Group CIO, says the move wasn't just about SharePoint. Holmes Group had its eyes on Microsoft Teams and deploying SharePoint Online enabled them to easily integrate Teams as the next step.

"Our journey has been well measured and well defined from the outset, with a view not just to the immediate achievement, but also the potential after that," he says.

Microsoft Teams was deployed across the organisation in 2018, providing a collaborative solution for the entire group. But there was more to come.

As an international company, Holmes Group had different telephony solutions and telco's in each country. For the ICT team, that meant coming up with and supporting unique, by-location solutions for each country.

OVERVIEW

The need

While Holmes Group had a one-team approach across its five subsidiary companies for document management and collaboration via SharePoint and Microsoft Teams, it needed a similar approach to cut the complexity for voice calls.

The solution

Lexel Systems, Holmes Group's trusted advisor and IT partner, helped deploy Microsoft Teams Enterprise Voice across the company's global operations, moving the company away from localised telephony solutions.

The results

- Teams Enterprise Voice has provided a leading edge communication and collaboration solution for Holmes Group
- A seamless, organisation-wide calling solution within Teams, providing one unified platform where staff can easily collaborate and communicate
- Improved reliability and uptime
- Efficient and effective solution for easy deployment of new employees, offices or workstations, with no need to run a separate voice network
- Easier procurement, management and rollout of equipment worldwide with a single class of user globally
- Increased productivity with collaboration, including documents, voice and chat in one place

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For the users it meant more complexity with the telephony system, particularly inter-country calling.

Solution

“We have a vision to have a ‘one team’ approach across the entire business and enable each user to collaborate naturally and feel more connected on a global basis,” says Sanchit Kaushal, Holmes Group ICT Project Manager and Business Analyst.

David Harvey, Lexel Account Manager, says for Holmes, who had been striving towards the modern workplace, the last pieces of the puzzle was to remove the shackles of picking up phones to call people – something he says is ‘not a natural way to operate anymore’.

“They are engineers. The core of what they do is to look to improve on things and make things better.” It’s an approach that aligns perfectly with Lexel’s own ethos.

As New Zealand’s go-to Microsoft partner for Teamwork assessments, Lexel takes a methodical approach to assessing, road mapping, deploying, integrating and supporting all aspects of Microsoft Teams, including voice, collaboration, knowledge management and adoption / change management.

For Holmes, Teams Enterprise Voice was the next logical step to achieving a modern workplace, adding full telephony capabilities into Teams and replacing on-premise telephony solutions.

The solution, provided in partnership with Lexel, enabled Holmes Group to leverage the international Teams platform and move away from localised telephony services.

With Lexel’s help, Teams Enterprise Voice was provisioned for a pilot in December 2018. By June 2019 the pilot had been expanded to 70 global participants.

“The system enables Holmes to leverage the benefits of having a Teams internal call locally while enabling them to make external calls, which the network recognises and routes externally over the Microsoft network,” says Brett Boule, Lexel’s General Manager of Digital, Cloud and Hybrid IT Services.

There were challenges along the way - largely in dealing with telco providers across different borders and the requirements for porting numbers, which differ by country. With Lexel’s guidance by September 2019 Holmes was confident Teams was a good fit for the company and rollout to the wider business began.

Results

“By using Teams and getting onto Teams Enterprise Voice we have closed the circle in enabling the one team collaborative approach, not only by chat, but by voice calls,” Kaushal says.

“We can all jump onto an organisation-wide calling solution and unified platform where we can chat, collaborate, meet, call, have conference calls and be able to transfer calls to each other easily”.

Mulholland says Teams and Enterprise Voice have helped simplify the company’s fairly complex communications technology, delivering greatly improved communications among staff and clients.

The solution is more reliable with high uptime, and the company no longer needs to worry about running wires and cables around the office to set up desk phones. Using a single class of user globally also makes it easier to procure, manage and rollout hardware.

“We can open a new office anywhere and there’s a repeatable experience,” Mulholland says. “We can easily and rapidly branch out to any location anywhere in the world.”

Whilst productivity gains are difficult to quantify at this early stage, both Kaushal and Mulholland agree that there has been a material improvement to end user productivity and because of standardisation, a significant decrease in user support costs.



“When looking at the larger project of Office 365, SharePoint Online and Teams Voice, you are essentially going to one place to create and track all your documents and conversations, rather than multiple systems. With the introduction of video conferencing, real-time collaboration on documents and whiteboards, sharing desktops, working on drawings and that sort of thing, has made a huge difference in how our people work,” says Mulholland.

For Boule, a critical part of the process was assisting in the implementation of a cohesive, structured road-map. “Anyone can enable a license for Teams, but being able to provide the professional skill and experience to transition an organisation like Holmes into the new modern workplace with a cloud-based Teams platform is the critical part. Not many people locally are able to deliver that migration piece and through the consulting practice, guide them to take the journey with confidence.”

Kaushal agrees. “Lexel has been there and understood the journey that we were about to embark upon and worked with us to create a plan. They provided critical help in finding the right telco partner and to support us during implementation. Once fully installed, Lexel further assisted our project team to upskill around Teams Voice, ensuring our team was ready to support the new solution.”

Holmes Group is now evaluating the next steps in its digital transformation journey, and will be looking to implement Microsoft Teams Rooms solutions in the near future.

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SAM MULHOLLAND
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER
HOLMES GROUP

“In this phase we addressed options and people’s experiences at their desk or mobile device. The next incremental step we’re making to that is in the spaces we meet in within our offices. That’s the next evolution of our communication and collaboration technology drive.”

Holmes

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Lexel specialise in providing solution consulting, infrastructure design, implementation, project management, outsourcing, support services and procurement. To deliver this wide range of services, Lexel Systems has partnered with the main technology providers in NZ and have secured the highest level of certifications possible with each of these partners.