

Vodafone solution helps Little Chef reduce support costs by £700,000

Fast facts

Customer

Little Chef

Web site

littlechef.co.uk

Number of employees

2,750

Country or region

United Kingdom

Industry

Retail

Customer profile

Little Chef is a British restaurant chain, with sites near most of the country's major roads and motorways. Founded in 1958, it now operates almost 180 locations across the UK.

Challenge

Restaurant managers were unable to gain fast access to sales data to help them plan orders. In addition, communication was limited because they had no devices for mobile email.

Solution

Little Chef provided restaurants with business broadband connections and gave managers BlackBerry devices to communicate more effectively with colleagues and suppliers.

Benefits

- Infrastructure costs are reduced
- Management information is available faster
- Employees are more flexible
- Project management is painless

Little Chef, a restaurant chain based in the United Kingdom (UK), needed a new communication solution to support regional managers, increase their flexibility and improve communication with head office. Vodafone offered Little Chef a flexible solution that helps managers work more effectively on the move, react faster to market trends and reduce support costs by around £700,000.



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Chris Andrewartha,
IT Director, Little Chef

Challenge

Little Chef is one of the UK’s best known restaurant chains, growing from a single location in Reading in 1958 to almost 180 sites across the country today. More than 14 million people eat in its restaurants each year, which are located along many of Britain’s major roads.

The industry is competitive, as Chris Andrewartha, IT Director at Little Chef, explains: “Our regional managers need up-to-date business information on individual restaurants to identify sales trends and react quickly to potential issues. A number of factors – such as major road works or diversions – can affect sales. We have to act swiftly when they come up.”

All of Little Chef’s management information is recorded on branch computers. Until recently, restaurant managers sent sales data to the head office over an expensive dial-up internet connection at the end of each week. There was a major problem with this approach – it took up to four days for the information to be processed, delaying the team’s ability to spot trends such as an increase in sales of a particular product, or a jump in customer numbers at a specific branch. In addition, office-based staff spent up to three days a week processing and sending data.

When regional managers needed figures quickly, they had to phone each branch individually or travel to the location in person, incurring high fuel costs. Their productivity was hampered because they couldn’t check their email or connect to the Little Chef network while travelling, and they often returned to the office outside normal hours to complete important tasks.

The company needed a solution that would make management information more accessible, while giving managers remote access to email. Andrewartha says: “Our solution didn’t give our managers the rapid insight they needed to work efficiently and maximise sales opportunities.”

Solution

Andrewartha and his team asked Vodafone to help the company increase managers’ flexibility, improve data accessibility and reduce costs. The Vodafone Account Manager took time to investigate the company’s requirements, before recommending a flexible working solution.

Vodafone provided Little Chef managers with mobile email, along with business broadband connections for each branch. Andrewartha says: “The team at Vodafone didn’t just come back with a list of products to sell – it listened to our business needs and delivered a tailored solution.”

The flexible working solution helps managers work productively on the move by accessing email on their BlackBerry® devices. They can achieve more and efficiently use time that previously would have been wasted. Regional reports and documents can be accessed from any branch, reducing travel time because managers no longer need to return to the office to log on to the network.

To provide more effective communication between restaurants and the Little Chef head office, Vodafone installed a multiprotocol label switching (MPLS) network solution across the business, replacing the outdated dial-up system. Now management data from each branch is automatically sent through a secure, reliable and high-speed link, so it’s available to managers within a few hours of a shift finishing.

Vodafone also helped Little Chef to control its costs, with a project run by the company’s Account Manager to identify and remove redundant connections. Vodafone Professional Services reduced the amount of administration required to run the network by managing the deployment of new lines, training Little Chef staff to use the technology, and ensuring that the company’s IT department was prepared to support the systems.

"We used to have polling problems because of corrupted or missing files, and a lot of management data had to be estimated. Now we are absolutely sure of our numbers, so we can be more responsive and make better business decisions."

Chris Andrewartha,
IT Director, Little Chef

Benefits

The flexible working solution from Vodafone has brought Little Chef up to date, with support for email on the move, an easily managed system and significant savings on maintenance costs. Says Andrewartha: "Vodafone played a big role in cutting our IT budget by more than £700,000. We're building an ongoing relationship and driving savings in other areas of our business."

Infrastructure costs are reduced

The Vodafone solution has helped Little Chef save £700,000 through reduced mobile, data, fixed line and IT costs. Andrewartha says: "Our Account Manager helped us cut fixed line rental by 60 per cent and mobile charges by 40 per cent."

Management information is available faster

Managers have access to data within hours of a shift ending, and can allocate resources and manage issues more effectively. "The information we work with is far more accurate," says Andrewartha. "We used to have polling problems because of corrupted or missing files, and a lot of management data had to be estimated. Now we are absolutely sure of our numbers, so we can be more responsive and make better business decisions."

Employees are more flexible

Regional managers use mobile email to keep up-to-date on branch performance while working remotely, and can use the secure broadband connection to work at restaurants. "They can use the restaurants as offices, helping them maximise their productivity," says Andrewartha. As well as helping them work smarter, the additional flexibility is creating a better work/life balance.

Project management is painless

Vodafone Professional Services helped manage the rollout of Little Chef's new network, and train users with the flexible working solution. "With the Vodafone project team, we were always confident the rollout would run smoothly," says Andrewartha. "And if we run into any problems, we're guaranteed a fast, expert response from our dedicated Account Manager."

For more information, visit vodafone.co.uk/business



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