

SURVIVING THE PANDEMIC WITH ZERO IMPACT



This major financial services company differentiates itself in the payment solutions market by offering customers a range of services, all under one roof. This means a lot rides on the resilience of its business operations. In its Coventry, UK location, a Serviced Workplace recovery solution from Sungard AS provides the office space needed to keep contact center staff safe and productive during the COVID-19 crisis, with zero impact on customers.

SOLUTIONS

- Sungard AS Serviced Workplace

RESULTS

- A resilient, flexible and connected solution for workforce recovery
- A fully equipped, ready-to-use emergency office environment
- Social distancing for employee safety and compliance
- Agents respond to nearly half a million calls per month
- Calls answered in only 14 seconds
- More than 300,000 chargebacks completed in 90 days

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Serving nearly 400 customers in more than 80 countries worldwide, a leading global provider of seamless, secure, innovative solutions to payment card issuers sought a Serviced Workplace Recovery solution from Sungard Availability Services (Sungard AS). The company, serving major financial institutions and retail clients, is headquartered in the southeast region of the United States, with 24,000 employees, and was named on the Forbes Global 2000 listing of the world's biggest public companies.

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*Senior Vice President of Managed Services
for the EMEA region*



THE CHALLENGE

Increasing demands for an instant response

It's a fact shared across all industries: Customers don't like to wait. And they especially don't like to languish on hold as they wait for "the next available agent."

When it comes to dealing with financial institutions, customer patience wanes even further. If they reach out to a call center with questions about their credit or debit cards, both consumers and commercial customers expect an instant response and fast problem resolution.

As the leading choice for payment solutions around the globe, this financial services company works with many of the world's largest financial institutions and retail customers. In addition to offering a range of other services, it acts as an extension of their clients' customer contact teams.

From the interactions involved in setting up accounts to fraud disputes, collections and charge backs, this company touches someone's life or business by supporting payment transactions more than 69 million times a day.

Workplace recovery amidst the COVID-19 crisis

The full end-to-end aspect of their services is what sets this provider apart in the market, while underscoring the need for disaster recovery

planning. In other words, the more payment services they manage for customers, the greater the impact if disruptions occur.

"When you're supporting such a regulated industry, with customers who may be vulnerable or stranded somewhere in need of cash, you obviously need a disaster recovery plan," says the company's Senior Vice President of Managed Services for the EMEA region.

While this client has had access to a Sungard AS Workplace Recovery Center for more than 10 years, the SVP confirms that the COVID-19 crisis changed the way the company thought about and reacted to a disruptive situation.

"Predominantly, we've used the workplace recovery service to have a facility and IT environment ready for us," he explains. "Where the COVID pandemic took it to a different level was around people—employees not being able to come into work because they were concerned, and self-isolating or testing positive for the infection.

"I had to view workplace recovery through the eyes of our agents," he continues. "I had to think about how I could make them feel safe coming to work, when they may be scared entering a lockdown environment in an unfamiliar city."



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THE SOLUTION

Quickly adapting for social distancing

With these challenges in mind, the company opted for a new approach to keeping payment operations flowing, while keeping employees less worried and more safe.

“As I reviewed my disaster recovery plan last March, I created a ‘worst-case’ scenario with COVID before a lockdown, assuming it was going to be Armageddon,” says the SVP. “I looked at how I could split the workforce to reduce the risk to employees, while continuing to deliver services to our customers without a detrimental impact.”

Nine days after speaking with his Sungard AS team about the plan, he had a new contract in place, shifting from a shared suite to a new solution with greater flexibility: the Sungard AS Serviced Workplace. This dedicated suite is tailored to align with COVID-19 regulations.

“The facility and what it offered was comparable to what we have at our site. It was no different from walking into our own building, but it was customized around the ever-changing government guidelines for social distancing,” notes the SVP.

Just two days later, those guidelines got even tighter. “When we signed the contract, we had planned to move 70 people into one dedicated suite.” He continues. “Then, the Prime Minister made an announcement, calling for a two-meter radius around every single seat in an office.”

In response, Sungard AS made four suites available, designed to the client’s precise specifications and dedicated solely to their exclusive use—and in record time.

“Sungard AS adapted to our aggressive timeline,” he reports. “From sale to seat, it took us only three weeks before we had 120 people taking calls in the recovery center, supporting our largest customer. If you think about this in a normal situation, realistically, it could take 90 days. But this was different, this was Armageddon.”

Operational resilience in a crisis

Since April 2020, Sungard AS’ Workplace Recovery Center in Coventry provides a safe and secure call center environment for the firm’s employees. In addition to the IT equipment, power and telephony they need to be productive, the facility provides an ISO/IEC 27001 certified environment with security access controls to protect the financial data this company manages for its customers. Thermal imaging technology provides temperature testing for extra protection against the virus.

With continuous business activity as the goal, the SVP divided the workforce by job function, with some employees remaining at the company’s own Coventry office. “We have seven lines of business, from fraud, disputes and charge backs to collections, customer service, back office and correspondence,” he explains. “I took a portion of each of those functions and put them in the Sungard AS facility. We created resilience and the assurance that we could service every customer, even if one site went down.”

To avoid the COVID risks of public transportation, the company also arranged for nearly 1,400 taxis to transport employees to work in the recovery center. To date, they have provided nearly 49,000 meals for employees, delivered to the center by food suppliers in airports, who sorely needed the business. “We had to think differently to keep the business going, support our employees and keep them safe, and that’s continued throughout the pandemic,” says the SVP.

To reduce the foot traffic in both Coventry locations, he also equipped about 200 at-home workers with technology and network access. “We communicate with them regularly to keep them up to speed, so they can feel safe and still part of our organization.”



THE RESULTS

Work continues without skipping a beat

As of March 2021, the company's employees continue to work at the Sungard AS recovery center. Throughout the pandemic, the solution has enabled the workforce to be spread out in a safe way as they continue to fulfill their roles.

"Many of our competitors suffered 25 to 30 percent absenteeism and performance issues because of COVID. We didn't," the SVP confirms. "At no point did we ever shut a facility or cause accessibility issues for our customers. Nor did they ever experience a detrimental impact," he continues, noting that many other organizations make callers wait as long as 40 minutes for an agent. "We still answered half a million calls a month, and our average speed of answering went from seven seconds to only 14—and during a pandemic."

The company was also able to keep up with an increased demand for chargebacks—the reversal of a sales transaction and one of the most critical, time-sensitive payment processing functions. Many of these requests poured in from people cancelling vacations due to COVID, and they expected the thousands spent to be quickly refunded.

"We re-purposed 180 people to be chargeback specialists, and we only had 90 days to process that work, which had gone up by 300 percent," says the SVP. "At a time when there was a lot of social media negativity about organizations that didn't process charge backs on time, we processed just under 300,000 individual customer cases within timescale, which is enormous."

As a result, this financial services company received high praise from clients and has been lauded as a success story for other organizations to follow.

"We're emerging from this in a really good place," the SVP says. "Because we've demonstrated how to manage a workforce during the pandemic, we've been asked to present to some of the world's leading financial institutions at an upcoming conference."

Innovating the caller experience

Even amidst COVID, the client worked with Sungard AS on a large transformation project that replaced legacy systems with state-of-the-art IT solutions in a new primary site, as well as the recovery facility.

"We moved into a TF4 datacenter with the latest technology and massive capacity," the SVP says. "After 12 months of planning, the transition took place one weekend in October. It was seamless."

Agents now work at desktop systems that integrate different communication channels and technologies for interacting with people who reach out to the contact center. This includes web chats, as well as voice biometrics, recognition technology that stores data from initial contacts to avoid the need for a caller to repeatedly validate their identity.

Agility for change

The customer values the flexible approach his Sungard AS team brought to the solution. "If someone said to me two years ago, I was going to spend money on things we never had before—from social distancing and thermal imaging to taxis and meals—I would never have expected to do so. But we've actually spent pennies to save pounds. If we didn't invest in this safety net, we could have gone backwards. Instead, we grew significantly last year, and it's largely due to the measures we took with Sungard AS."



“ Disaster recovery is evolving. It’s no longer just about bricks and mortar and functionality, it’s about people. You may hear others talk about the importance of the customer journey. I also talk about the employee journey, because my business is based on people, and everything I can do to support them.”

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