AkzoNobel improves the customer experience with new in-store technologies

Customer Agenda
- Continuous Improvement/Innovation
- Risk Avoidance
- Environmentally Conscious

Solution Overview
- Flexible Workplace
- Smart Supply
- Supply Chain Services

Technology
- HP T510 thin clients
- HP Officejet Pro X476EW multi-function printer
- HP LaserJet Pro 400 M401 series
- Communications Cabinets

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Customer challenge
To help achieve its vision of becoming the global leader in decorative coatings, AkzoNobel needed to standardise its business operations. As part of this standardisation drive, the Company decided to launch a new retail management system within its Dulux Decorator Centre stores network, replacing legacy in-store computers to ensure compatibility.

Computacenter solution
Computacenter provided a ‘shop-in-a-box’ solution, which included new thin client devices, multi-function devices and printers. It was responsible for sourcing, configuring and implementing the new technologies at 189 stores across the UK and Ireland.

Results
The refresh has provided AkzoNobel with the technologies it needs to standardise business operations. The implementation has also helped reduce energy costs, increase employee productivity and improve communications. Most importantly, these factors mean it can provide better services to its customers.
Customer profile:

**Supplying decorative paints since the 1950s**

One of the top ten super brands in the UK, Dulux – and its iconic Old English sheepdog – has been synonymous with high quality decorative paints since the 1950s.

One of the world’s leading industrial companies, AkzoNobel has owned the Dulux brand since its acquisition of ICI in 2008. Headquartered in Amsterdam and employing 50,000 people across 80 countries, the company is also a leader in performance coatings and specialty chemicals.

From Truro in Cornwall to Elgin in Scotland, AkzoNobel supplies paint across the UK and Northern Ireland through its 189 Dulux Decorator Centres. The store’s 1000 members of staff serve the needs of both trade and public customers. Further afield, the company owns another 250 stores across mainland Europe.

The organisation’s vision is to be the global leader in decorative coatings.

Business challenge:

**Standardising business operations across Europe**

A disciplined and customer-focused approach is central to realising this ambition. To ensure brand consistency, improve operations and establish a repeatable model for support, the company recognised the need to standardise its business operations.

Chris Gibson, AkzoNobel’s IT Infrastructure Manager for Decorative Paints for UK and Ireland, reveals: “Many of our processes were manual or inefficient – for example the process for ordering stock – and that meant we couldn’t spend as much time with customers as we wanted to.”

To address these challenges, the company decided to consolidate its diverse electronic pricing systems across Europe with a single central retail management system, starting in the UK and Ireland. The stores’ legacy desktop computers were holding the company back, however. “The store computers ran outdated operating systems that were not compatible with the new application,” explains Chris.

IT solution:

**Shop-in-a-box**

AkzoNobel therefore embarked on a full technology refresh to replace its 900 ageing store devices. As the first step, it issued a tender to find a suitable IT partner for the project.

“We wanted a partner that could provide an end-to-end solution for our 189 stores in the UK and Ireland initially, and then potentially to 211 of our stores across France, Sweden and the Netherlands, with more countries to follow later in the year,” explains Chris. “We looked at three companies, but having worked with Computacenter on previous projects, we knew it had the scale and European reach we needed to successfully deliver the project.”
Computacenter was responsible for providing AkzoNobel with a consolidated ‘shop-in-a-box’ solution, including technology sourcing, configuration, installation and support. The technologies for each store included new HP thin clients running Windows 7. Stores also received a new communications cabinet, an HP multi-function printer and one or two smaller printers, depending on the size of the branch.

To minimise disruption, Computacenter configured the 900 thin clients at its Operations Centre in Hatfield before deployment. “Computacenter’s engineers spent one day at each store to remove the old devices and install the new equipment while our employees continued to serve our customers with no operational impact,” comments Chris.

Computacenter also disposed of the old equipment, ensuring that AkzoNobel abided by WEEE regulations and providing certificates for secure data destruction and a detailed report for asset management.

Streamlining ongoing support and procurement

The refresh began in September 2013 and was completed in just six weeks. At the height of the project, nine stores were upgraded each day. “We were impressed by Computacenter’s structured approach to the project and strong emphasis on good communications - the project manager was in constant contact. This meant potential issues were identified and resolved early, ensuring that the project was delivered on time and within budget,” says Chris.

Computacenter is now responsible for supporting the newly installed technology. “We have our own team of two engineers managing all our IT needs,” Chris explains. “Whenever there is a problem with the hardware, our staff can log a call with the Computacenter service desk and an engineer will be sent to the store.”

Computacenter has also set up an online portal to make it easier for both AkzoNobel’s IT department and the stores to order new equipment as and when they need it. The portal is configured with a predefined catalogue of products that can be ordered at the click of a button.

“The portal will be particularly useful when we open new stores,” says Chris. “We can order the hardware needed and it will be dispatched from Computacenter’s Configuration Centre where a number of preconfigured items will be kept, ready to be sent out at short notice.”

“We couldn’t spend as much time with customers as we wanted to.”

Chris Gibson, IT Infrastructure Manager, Decorative Paints for UK and Ireland, AkzoNobel
Results:

A standardised environment for better customer service

AkzoNobel's 189 stores in the UK and Ireland are now equipped with the latest thin client technologies. “Although providing access to the new retail management system was the key driver behind the project, the technology refresh has delivered so much more,” comments Chris. “Staff can communicate more effectively and access HR and other self-service applications really easily through the new devices.”

The new in-store technologies are helping AkzoNobel to:

Increase efficiency: Now stores have standardised technologies, they can start to standardise and streamline processes. In particular, the new retail system will enable staff to process orders more easily and enable the enterprise-wide adoption of retail best practices.

Become more customer-focused: Customer-facing employees will have more time to spend serving customers, and with improved communications via the in-store devices, they can contact colleagues in other stores easily for help and advice.

Reduce energy costs: The thin client devices use less power than traditional desktop computers and are switched off every night, enabling AkzoNobel to minimise carbon emissions and deliver on its commitment to making its products and operations more sustainable.

“By upgrading store technologies we’ve been able to create an environment that empowers staff to work more productively and serve customers more efficiently,” concludes Chris.

The project is due to be extended to a further three European countries in March 2014.