On entering the Portuguese market in 1992, Vodafone brought about a profound change in the mobile telecommunications landscape in Portugal. Since beginning its activity, the company has positioned itself as a reference in this market.

Today Vodafone Portugal is a Global Telecommunications Operator, offering a convergent service recognized in the various segments that make up the market. With more than 4.8 million customers who rely on its communications needs, Vodafone Portugal is the leader in innovation, brand image, and customer satisfaction.

An integral part of the Vodafone Group - which, with more than 465 million cellphone customers and 13.7 million landline customers, is one of the largest telecommunications operators in the world - Vodafone Portugal is also the customer of dozens of service providers. These service providers are responsible for ensuring the operation of more than 14,000 assets and the provision of dozens of different types of service in around a hundred buildings throughout Portugal.

In order to ensure the monitoring of commitments made by these service providers to Vodafone Portugal, the company decided to implement an Assets & Facilities Management solution based on services in the cloud and implemented by NextBitt on the Microsoft Azure platform.

Position

In a large company with a presence throughout the country, managing the providers of support services - cleaning, maintenance, catering, etc. - is never an easy task. In the case of Vodafone Portugal, managing these suppliers is even more crucial because it has high demands requiring the close monitoring of contracted services.

“In the first phase,” explains Luís Ameixa, Infrastructure Engineer at Vodafone and one of the internal people in charge of the company's Facilities Management project, “we started by tendering to reduce the number of service providers - which, until around five years ago was

over 50. At the same time, we defined as a prerequisite that the company should have a management platform through which we could manage operations and monitor their implementation."

Despite Vodafone having optimized the number of service providers, Luís Ameixa admits that the request regarding platforms did not work: "Each platform was different but, worse than that, every time there was a change in supplier, all the information we had on the previous supplier in the platform was lost."

On the other hand, there was an additional problem, explains Esther Domínguez, an Infrastructure Engineer also linked to this project: "Vodafone's help desk would receive all its requests by email, which created an additional difficulty, not only in processing these requests, but also in following them up."

It was this experience that highlighted the need for Vodafone Portugal to adopt its own Assets & Facilities Management platform. According to Luís Ameixa, "We concluded that instead of having to adapt to the different platforms of the various suppliers, they would be the ones using a common platform, managed by us."

Solution

Since Vodafone Portugal launched the tender for the design and supply of the Facilities Management platform, one of the requirements was highlighted straight away: "For it to work in the way that we wanted - accessible from anywhere and without our suppliers having to be certified to use our internal network - it was fundamental to have everything in the Cloud," affirms Ameixa.

The chosen solution was the NextBitt platform for Assets & Facilities Management, a Microsoft partner with robust experience in developing solutions supported by Microsoft Azure, the open and flexible Cloud service platform by Redmond Technology.

André Calixto, one of the people in charge of the NextBitt project, explains that the Microsoft

Azure platform came about naturally: “In light of the other alternatives, Microsoft Azure had a great advantage for us from the outset - it has strong local support. In this area, Microsoft clearly has the greatest commitment to the Portuguese market.”

On the other hand, and in the specific case of NextBitt, since all the technology the company used in developing a solution is based on Microsoft technology (ASP.NET, Visual Studio/Xamarin, and SQL Server) Microsoft Azure is the quickest and easiest platform for doing deployments.

There were only three months between making the decision and the first production version, including the migration of existing data to the new Facilities Management platform. The system serves around 200 users (including service and/or operations requesters, service providers and the Vodafone Portugal management and supervision team) and it will soon be extended to an additional 170 agent stores and company partners throughout the country.

Benefits

For Luís Ameixa, the benefits of the NextBitt platform that Vodafone Portugal is using are clear, both from the point of view of the firm's internal users, who request operations, and of the respective service providers.

“It has become an essential tool for all requests made by the Vodafone workforce, but also to manage the most preventive part of the tasks that are done over time on a regular basis,” explains Luís Ameixa, who also recalls that “Vodafone Portugal has ISO 14000 environmental certification, which means we are obliged to have information to verify compliance - which has become much easier now.”

Esther Domínguez reports that one of the biggest benefits for internal users is that everything is done directly on the platform: “There is now a self-service facility for service requesters, and no request is ever left unanswered. Besides this, the danger of spreading information among different files, which sometimes created repetitions and made it difficult to manage requests, has been eliminated.”

Our relationship with service providers has also improved significantly. "The process has become more demanding, but it is also more transparent, since Vodafone Portugal's management team, service requesters and providers now have access to the same tool, which allows for real-time tracking of orders," concludes Esther Domínguez.

"Previously, most of the requests were made and tracked through email and telephone , making it difficult to monitor operations," explains Luís Ameixa. "Now, with the platform in the cloud, everything is done simply through a browser anywhere and on any device: a store requests an operation, the help desk screens it and the provider who should resolve the problem receives a notification. The follow-up of the process up to its completion is also done through the platform." The system processes more than 60,000 notifications per year.

Ameixa also emphasizes the great flexibility and modularity of the solution. "We have been developing the solution to meet our needs and there is great flexibility in how to configure the software. Suppliers have different ways of viewing the information and the Vodafone management team is able to perform numerous advanced configurations without having to request changes to NextBitt," he concludes.

Although it is not possible for Vodafone Portugal to quantify the savings achieved through this solution, Pedro Morais, of NextBitt, says that "the solution was designed as SaaS [Software as a Service], therefore there is always a right-sizing relative to the customer's requirements, which is facilitated by the fact that Microsoft Azure performs an automatic sizing of the hardware platform in accordance with the load."

This characteristic of the solution also allows Vodafone Portugal to consider future ways to develop. "The Facilities Management area is always constantly developing," says Luís Ameixa, "and if today we already have seven or eight work-flows implemented, whether it be in the area of hard services [electricity, civil construction…] or soft services [cleaning, catering, waste management, etc.] the solution allows us to continue to grow flexibly and in a way that is tailored to our needs."

One of the next steps will be to automate the process of obtaining the KPIs [Key Performance Indicators] through Microsoft Power BI, a development that Esther Domínguez is already anticipating: "Previously, getting the KPIs took a whole morning; now we have reduced the process to about an hour - but with Power BI it will be done in real-time."

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