



Political Intelligence wants virtual CIO

Managing an SME is hard enough without having to worry about IT too much. And only very few SMEs have someone with an IT background to run things for them, let alone a CIO. This is why Political Intelligence wanted to outsource all its IT activities to an IT partner it could trust. 'You need to leave IT to the experts,' says CEO Isabelle De Vinck.

Political Intelligence's offices are up on the fifth floor, away from the heavy flow of traffic and noise on Brussels' Law Street below. A large, well-lit meeting room shows off an impressive LCD screen and associated array of videoconferencing equipment – the only visible signs of the company's recent digital transformation, taken care of by Realdolmen. The biggest changes are less visible, however, and by no means less impressive.

COMPLAINTS ABOUT IT

Political Intelligence, a public affairs agency, has become a recognised authority in the technology sector. 'We've been working with AI in various other sectors recently, but most of our customers are still mainly technology companies,' explains De Vinck. 'Customers who of course expect you to be up to date with all the latest developments in IT, and need everything to run smoothly, which unfortunately wasn't always the case until recently. We were receiving lots of complaints from customers who wanted to come and meet with us, but we had an outdated and faltering IT infrastructure, and that's unacceptable in an office like ours. It's essential that our customers see us as a modern, professional and reliable organisation, and that means our IT needs to run perfectly.'

When the office decided to move into new premises at the start of the year, De Vinck decided to take the bull by the horns and look for a new IT partner. Things clicked straight away with Esther Van Ham-Grave from Realdolmen in their first meeting. 'Isabelle was maybe even a bit too enthusiastic,' remembers Van Ham-Grave. 'I explained everything that Realdolmen had to offer, and she wanted pretty much all of it, preferably straight away. I had to step on the brakes a bit so we could make a plan together and approach all the IT needs one step at a time. That's the only way we can offer our customers the quality they expect from us.'

VIDEOCONFERENCING AND SKYPE

Political Intelligence was already working with Microsoft Office 365, so the experts from Realdolmen assumed control straight away. The biggest change was switching to Skype for Business with custom videoconferencing equipment and new monitors, which immediately gave the organisation a much more professional image. The network is fully integrated, too, so you can even answer the doorbell with Skype for Business. Making full use of wireless options has had a very positive effect how the office space is used.



Employees in the Brussels office (other branches include London and Madrid) received training to work with the new equipment, which was a very important part of the process. ‘Sometimes in the beginning I used to call the general number, just as a kind of test,’ laughs De Vinck. ‘It was often picked up quite hesitantly. It can take a little bit of getting used to before it all becomes second nature.’

ABSOLUTE UNBURDENING

Political Intelligence is already preparing for the next step: Workplace as a Service (WPaaS). ‘SMEs generally can’t afford to employ fulltime IT professionals,’ says De Vinck. ‘But I want to be completely unburdened, and need my IT partner to have every aspect under control. So when a new employee starts, I want there to be a laptop ready for them, with the right email account configured, access to the wireless network all set up, everything. Even the smaller things like headsets, printers and anything that our partner can give us that helps, so we don’t need to keep buying and replacing things. I also want support requests not to be centralised before they go to the partner anymore, which we currently need to do to keep the IT budget under control. I’d like to give each employee a number of credits, for example, so they can open support tickets independently at their own discretion. Then I only need to intervene when they’ve used up their credits, which would save me lots of time.’



EVERY SME’S DREAM

Realdolmen is fully committed to this approach. ‘But there’s a lot involved,’ says Van Ham-Grave. ‘You need to have the right equipment in stock, for example, so that you can supply and configure everything straight away. New contracts need to be drawn up, agreements need to be made about who can and must store customer data, and so on.’

De Vinck certainly hopes the new service will come soon. ‘I think this is a formula that every SME dreams of,’ she says. And she’s already very satisfied that the investment in better equipment and software is starting to bear fruit. ‘Twenty employees not needing to wait ten minutes for their computers to start every morning already makes a big difference,’ she explains. ‘And there are more and better options for working and collaborating more efficiently now, too. Some of the effects are of course less quantifiable, but they’re absolutely undeniable. Having full confidence in your IT means you’re free to really focus on your customers, and they notice the difference.’

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