



AN ACXIOM CASE STUDY

COMPLEX, LARGE-SCALE, REAL-TIME DATA MIGRATION

To comply with a fair competition ruling, BT needed to ensure that its retail division was not at an advantage over other telecoms providers using its lines.

It set up the Openreach division and implemented new operational processes to achieve this and, with the help of Acxiom, transferred more than 12 million consumer accounts to a new data platform without any impact on the customer experience. As a result, it met legal obligations on time, avoiding financial penalties. It also gained greater customer insight enabling more effective marketing communications.

THE COMPANY

BT Group is the largest UK telecoms operator. Formerly a state-owned organisation, the Group owns and maintains the access network that links homes and businesses across the UK. Along with hundreds of other telecoms service providers, it also sells communications packages using this network through its BT Retail Consumer division.

LEGALLY BINDING UNDERTAKING

In line with UK competition legislation, BT made a legally binding undertaking to industry regulator Ofcom to operate BT Retail Consumer in an 'equivalent' manner to other telecoms service providers that use the same access network. This would mean that the fact that BT Group owned the infrastructure would not give BT Retail Consumer an advantage in selling communications services.

The Group established Openreach as a separate business to work with both telecoms service providers and BT Retail in the same way. To ensure equivalence of operation, BT Retail Consumer needed to extract all customer account details from a 20-year-old legacy mainframe system serving the entire BT Group and transfer them to a new customer servicing and billing system specifically designed to support its retail operation.

THE CHALLENGE

A legally binding commitment to Ofcom to operate in an 'equivalent' manner to other service providers using the BT network.

SOLUTION

A large-scale and complex data migration to separate BT's retail operation. Acxiom migrated 12 million accounts with 80,000 product combinations, achieving a migration quality level of more than 99.5% correct at the first attempt.

RESULTS

- **BT satisfied Ofcom** that it can operate in a way that enables fair trade in the telecoms service provider sector, avoiding significant potential fines.
- **Migration** to the new data platform has provided BT with greater customer insight, enabling it to deliver personalised and highly targeted customer communications.





COMPLEX CHALLENGE

The scale and the complexity of the project were daunting. The company had to migrate data relating to more than 12 million customers and over 80,000 product combinations. It was legally obliged to make the first transfers within six months of project inception, and to complete the entire migration within three years.

BT knew it required specialist help to ensure it fulfilled these deadlines while ensuring a seamless transition for its customers. “This was always going to be a very challenging project and we were looking for a company that could help us unravel the problems we were going to face,” explains Judith Harding, Migrations Director at BT. “We selected Acxiom because it demonstrated it could provide a team with the in-depth data management understanding and superior technical expertise we needed.”

CLOSE COLLABORATION

Such a complex project called for close collaboration. A dedicated team of data management experts worked side-by-side with BT staff as an integral part of the overall project team. As well as assisting with initial project planning, they also attended regular review sessions and worked as an integral part of the programme team, which at peak involved well over 500 people. Acxiom worked with many areas of BT including billing, customer services, and consumer product and marketing functions. The Acxiom team provided analytics to support decision making as well as working with BT’s technical teams to build end-to-end migrations capability.

According to Judith, consistency was key throughout: “Because Acxiom committed some of its most talented individuals for the duration of the project, it was able to grow its knowledge over time and improve its approach incrementally.”

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

Before any transfers took place, the project team first needed to understand the data. To achieve this, Acxiom loaded the existing database into a data mining tool, enabling it to analyse different customer groupings and schedule staged migrations.

“We specialise in helping customers to understand and identify data segments for targeted communications,” comments Melanie Dudley, Account Manager at Acxiom. “It is precisely this expertise that we applied to this project – helping us to identify appropriate data segments for migration.”

Judith believes this in-depth analysis was critical to the smooth running of the project. “To meet Ofcom’s deadlines, we needed to migrate the high-volume customer groups first,” she remarks. “Being able to turn around questions about data on a regular basis allowed us to plan effectively.”

CONTROLLED MIGRATION

But understanding the data was only part of the story. The Acxiom team then needed to extract the data from the legacy database, transform it using a specially constructed migration engine and send it in the correct format for loading into the new system. The team also set up comprehensive reporting to enable progress tracking and ensure that no data was lost during the process.

A key requirement for the technical specialists constructing the migration engine was to incorporate a set of rules to identify records that did not fit the criteria for a particular transfer, and return them to the main data set for migration at another time. “As we were processing up to 100,000 accounts each night any errors were likely to be high in volume,” says Judith. “It was vital that we built in the capability to cope with ‘fallout’ records without losing any valuable customer data.”

FLEXIBLE APPROACH

With the new customer servicing and billing system still in development, the Acxiom team needed a flexible approach. “We had to co-ordinate very closely with the development programme for the new data platform,” comments Art Schaeffer, Director at EMC, Acxiom’s project partner. “Each time there was a change to the new system, Acxiom had to update the migration controller. This made the project much more complex.”

Acxiom staff also demonstrated an impressive can-do mentality when asked to comply with certain security requirements. “We have extremely stringent security rules for some customers and the Acxiom team stepped up and delivered on these,” emphasises Judith. “I was immensely pleased with their response to this challenge.”


COMMITTED TEAM

Judith feels that the expertise of Acxiom’s staff made their input invaluable. “They know their subject but they were also very keen to listen, learn and respond to requests,” she remarks.

However, it is their attitude that stands out the most. “The team was 100% committed and there was a real passion in what they were doing,” she confirms. “They never said ‘we can’t do this’. They faced every challenge and often worked through the night to deliver what we needed.”

INCREASED CUSTOMER INSIGHT

Over a three-year period, all targets agreed with Ofcom were met according to the specified schedule, ensuring BT could fulfil its legal obligations under the Competition Act. BT Retail Consumer now operates in an equivalent manner to other communications service providers using BT’s network, ensuring fair trading across the UK telecoms market.



“We are now able to sell products in a way that is more in tune with what customers actually want. This has helped us to move on strategically and continue to be competitive in the market place.”

— Judith Harding,
Migrations Director, BT



However, as well as satisfying the industry regulator, BT has also gained significant competitive advantage thanks to the project. The new customer servicing and billing system is enabling BT Retail Consumer to package products in ways the legacy system would not allow.

Post-migration, Acxiom continues to assist BT Retail Consumer’s marketing team in identifying and targeting key segments for more targeted customer contacts and communications.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

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