STCS PROJECT PROFILE

Northern Electric
Customer Information and Billing

NORTHERN ELECTRIC

Northern Electric and Gas was an electricity and gas supply, and electricity distribution company serving north east England. Formed and privatised in 1990 from the assets of the North Eastern Electricity Board, it operated in the deregulated electricity and gas supply markets.

Although it was purchased in 1996 by the American corporation CalEnergy, which formed a subsidiary, CE Electric, to run it, Northern Electric and Gas remained the retail brand until 2001, when npower obtained the supply business in a revolutionary swap arrangement for the electricity distribution business of Yorkshire Electric. npower was then itself acquired in 2002 by the german corporation RWE. RWE npower is now the UK's largest electricity supplier.

RWE npower generates electricity and supplies gas, electricity and related services to around 6.8 million customers. The company also operates and manages a flexible portfolio of power stations, and is a market leader in renewable energy development through its wind and hydro business, npower renewables.

PROJECT REQUIREMENT AND SCOPE

STCS worked within the Customer Information and Billing (CIB) programme from 1997 until 2001 initially as part of the Technical Design Authority then after the first few months as a Technical Architect. The architect role was revived from 2004 to 2006.

The CIB programme principally consists of three main systems; Integrated Billing (IB) is the billing system for both domestic and half-hourly customers, Integrated Customer Service (ICS) supports the call centres for customer care, and Site Administration (SA) deals with the issues surrounding the gain or loss of the customer from/to other suppliers. All systems conform to the open markets protocols/agreements, such as the Data Transfer Catalogue (DTC) and Supply Point Administration Agreement (SPAA). There were also ancillary systems such as for pre-payment meters and exceptional cases.

Principal architectural responsibility was for the Customer and Premise Database (CPD), and its primary systems ICS and Site Admin, along with several ancillary systems for functions such as Management Information or message routing. As a live system, in use 7 days a week, the incremental development of ICS had to be handled very carefully, and it was vital that the development of this database was co-ordinated with, and supportive of, all the systems using it. Central Data Architectural control was key to the success of this. Quality practices were also introduced and the design of the database was captured into a central CASE repository (Principia).

Prior to the major release and live implementation of CIB, we also managed the project that cleansed and converted the database, to support the open gas and electricity markets. This involved major changes in the structure and the content of the database, which was supporting the live call centre 7 days a week.

During this period, we were also involved in specifying the changes required from a supplier perspective for the ASSIGN work management system implementation from Wheatley Associates for Northern Metering Services Limited (NMSL) another part of Northern Electric that performed the Meter Operator (MOP) and Data Collector (DC) roles. Following this we were part of the project board that controlled these changes.

The day to day architect role encompassed evaluation of all business requirements for the CIB Programme, to determine the best technical solutions and the systems and teams impacted, and the documentation of these solutions at a high level. Thereafter co-ordination and policing of the various design teams and approval of all functional and testing specifications was provided, to ensure fully integrated and consistent solutions were delivered.

KEY TECHNOLOGIES USED

Data Analysis
Database Design
Business Analysis
Systems Analysis
Systems Architecture
Project Management
PRINCE
CASE tools (Principia)