ISSUE 54 | November 2016 | www.housing-technology.com | £6.95

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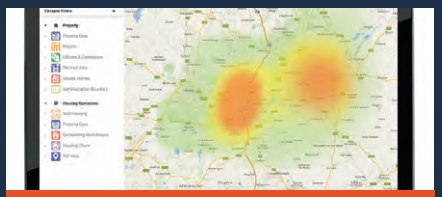

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EDITOR'S NOTES

Trends for 2017

This issue of Housing Technology marks the end of our ninth year of publishing the magazine. 54 issues and 2,500+ stories later (all available online at www.housing-technology.com), we're taking a look at what to expect in 2017 and beyond as part of our preparations for the forthcoming Housing Technology 2017 report.

Aside from ongoing developments and improvements in (and integration between) applications for particular business areas, such as mobile working, asset management, CRM and digital, we predict three main trends.

The first is what we would term the 'businessification of IT'. That is to say that the role of IT in housing will accelerate its progress from being originally (say, 10 years ago) a back-office function, through being a value-adding service (say, five years ago) to become the central cortex of housing providers' operations, with IT driving innovation and change across all of their internal and external services.

The second trend will be around eschewing the blinkered belief that the social housing sector is somehow 'different' from other sectors and the resulting somewhat narrow view of the world. Housing providers and technology suppliers will increasingly look at 'disruptive' technologies and what's worked well in other sectors and apply them to housing. At the same time, there will be a trend towards replacing housing-specific software with generic, horizontal applications from companies such as Microsoft and SAP.

The third trend will be around how housing providers handle data, and will split into two streams of data management. The first stream will see housing providers combining and aggregating all the data they hold on tenants, properties, repairs records, finance and so on into 'data lakes' in order to proactively analyse, predict and plan the future. The second stream will cover cyber-security and data protection, and in particular how housing providers protect personal data on their tenants.

These three trends (and more) will be covered more fully in the forthcoming Housing Technology 2017 report, details of which will be published in the next issue.

Delivering IoT at scale?

In the November 2015 issue of Housing Technology's Editor's Notes, we commented on how housing providers should be ideally placed to roll out IoT projects at scale because they are, almost without exception, the only organisations in the country with direct access to large networks of properties under their control (unlike utility companies and their networks of customers).

However, from talking to both housing providers and technology suppliers alike at Housing Technology's annual reception in London earlier this month, it emerged that one of the most significant barriers to the widespread adoption of IoT is a concern about the possible support issues that might arise from deploying, say, 10,000 IoT devices across a housing provider's stock, especially when most IoT solutions are relatively new and unproven.

Getting the devices and sensors into tenants' homes is one thing (and not to be under-estimated), but subsequently having to support those devices is probably beyond most housing providers' capabilities to do so themselves, while most of the IoT suppliers focusing on social housing are relatively small and new and therefore don't have the scale of operations (unlike, say, British Gas or BT) to deploy an army of support engineers when things need fixing.

With this in mind, Housing Technology believes that we will see a very large number of new IoT deployments from 2017 onwards, but majority of these projects will be either pilot projects of up to around 100 devices and properties or larger installations of no more than 1,000 devices and properties.

This is not to say that IoT projects can't scale, but merely a recognition that this is still a relatively new area and very few housing providers will want to be lumbered with the potential support issues of 100 per cent IoT deployments until they have tested their ability (and/or their suppliers' abilities) to manage those devices once deployed.

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PRINTED IN THE UK BY
The Magazine Printing Company
www.magprint.co.uk

THE INTELLIGENT BUSINESS COMPANY LTD
Hoppingwood Farm
Robin Hood Way
London, SW20 0AB
United Kingdom
Head Office: 0208 336 2293

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NEXT-GENERATION DIGITAL PLATFORM FROM ORCHARD

Orchard has released a new digital platform to help housing providers deliver cost savings, efficiencies and improved services through digital transformation.

As part of significant investments in new product development, Orchard designed and developed the solution in partnership with several customers and a specialist digital UX/UI consultancy. The platform is integral to Orchard's existing core housing and CRM software and gives tenants access to the key information and services they need in real time via any online device. It was developed from the outset as a 'mobile first' solution and offers tenants a range of digital services covering rents, repairs, lettings, ASB/complaints, surveys and e-commerce.

The digital platform includes a self-appointing repairs (SAR) function so that tenants can choose and book a repair appointment online and manage their own appointments, reducing their need to use more expensive contact channels such as call centres.

Danny Tobin, commercial director, Orchard, said, "Digital channel-shift is a key dynamic in the sector at the moment. We hope that our new digital platform will change the way housing providers work by addressing head on the key dynamics of channel shifting tenants towards more online services."

Tandridge signs with Orchard

Orchard has reported that Tandridge District Council in Surrey is set to implement the company's housing and asset management software in order to improve how it manages its portfolio of around 4,500 properties and garages. With emphasis on making it easier and faster for staff and customers to access the information they need, Tandridge is particularly keen to take advantage of Orchard's online self-service and workflow capabilities.

Marek Witko, head of landlord services, Tandridge District Council, said, "We are delighted to have Orchard delivering our housing and asset management systems for us. It was clear from the tender response that Orchard understood our business and has the knowledge and experience to get us to where we need to be."

Orchard's new board (L-R): Ian Shard, John Doughty, Lucy Armstrong, John Hunt & Daniel Tobin

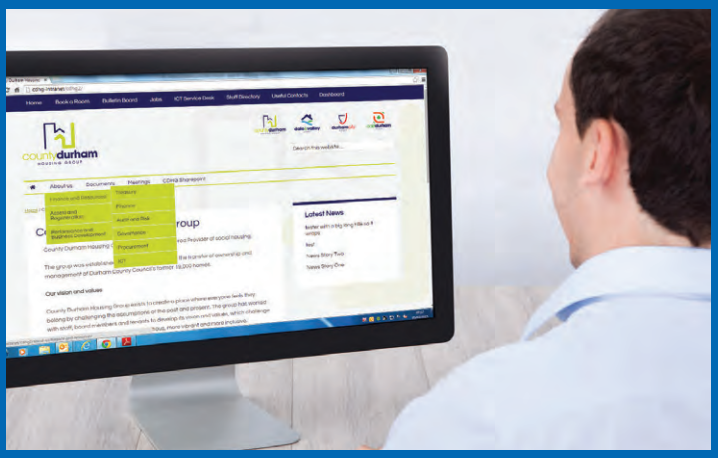
Orchard gears up for new products & growth

Orchard Information Systems has strengthened its board to lead the company's investment in new products and services.

Managing director Ian Shard has now been joined by Lucy Armstrong as the company's new non-executive chair and Danny Tobin as its new commercial director. Armstrong is chief executive of The Alchemists, which helps businesses achieve successful growth and Tobin joins from Hargreaves plc. Orchard's founding director, Peter Hunt, has now retired from the board but will maintain an interest in the business as its major shareholder.

Lucy Armstrong said, "Orchard is in an enviable position in the current uncertain environment. We have profits that we can invest in developing new products and services, we have a large portfolio of clients and partners across the UK, and we have an experienced and forward-thinking workforce."

COMPANIES IN THIS ISSUE



AAREON WINS COUNTY DURHAM HMS & PORTAL CONTRACT

UK has recently been awarded a contract for its Aareon QL housing management system and iHousing tenant portal by County Durham Housing Management Group (CDHG).

CDHG was established in 2015 following the transfer of ownership and management of Durham County Council's former 18,500 properties. The housing group now consists of three local landlords, Dale and Valley Homes, Durham City Homes and East Durham Homes, who benefit from the power of a group structure while still focusing on their own communities' interests.

In May 2016, using the Crown Commercial procurement service, CDHG issued a tender for a single housing management system for 300 users working across the group, with minimal reliance on modules that didn't form part of the core housing system. Web based self-service was an essential part of the solution that would allow tenants to log repairs, check rent account balances, make payments, set up direct debits and to send and receive messages.

Aareon was awarded the contract in August 2016 for its Aareon QL housing management system and its iHousing tenant portal, designed to provide round the clock internet access to services and information for CDHG's tenants, allowing them to self-serve at a time, and in a place that suits them.

As well as the core housing management modules, the complete Aareon QL offering includes a fully-integrated CRM module, Aareon 1st Touch Mobile, electronic document management and dynamic resource scheduling.

Weaver Vale speeds up re-lets with Aareon QL Voids+

Weaver Vale Housing Trust has cut its average void periods from seven weeks to four weeks following its implementation of Aareon's QL Voids+ software earlier this year.

The housing provider originally implemented the Aareon QL housing management system in 2010, including the standard Aareon QL Voids Management module. However, following a value for money self-assessment exercise, Weaver Vale noted that its re-let times were increasing, with an average of seven weeks.

At the start of 2016, Weaver Vale started a project around the commercialisation of its re-letting and voids service, with the aim of improving visibility of the void data and void performance in general. One of the sub-projects was to implement the Aareon QL Voids+ module which went live in June 2016.

The upgrade from standard QL Voids to QL Voids+ needed commitment from Weaver Vale to involve the right people, to look at their data quality and to prioritise the QL Voids+ implementation.

Commenting on the implementation, Joanne Watkins, transformation manager, Weaver Vale Housing Trust, said, "Our advice would be to take a structured approach, have a clear plan, be very methodical about what you need to test, think about how it will impact on non-dwelling voids and test, test, test."

Since the introduction of QL Voids+, re-let times are now down to an average of four weeks, and within the first month of using QL Voids+, Weaver Vale had four zero-day voids.

Sue Donovan, lettings team leader, said, "With QL Voids+, the progress of all voids is now clearly visible in one location so we can provide more effective and timely updates to our tenants and ensure our workloads are prioritised better. We can also record any properties allocated in zero days which will be rewarding to see and will act as a real motivator, as well as see the impact that specific properties have on our overall re-let times."

Paul Newton, acting voids and improvements manager, said, "Moving to QL Voids+ has greatly improved the visibility of the data, helping us to identify blockages in the process. Staff are now aware that they are being more closely monitored which has resulted in increased accountability. The team had a great sense of achievement when the first zero-day voids were achieved together with improved re-let times."

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DATA IS A CURRENCY – SPEND IT WISELY

Chris McLaughlin, Managing Director, MIS AMS

Data is becoming a currency, but how do we derive value from it? We leave trails of data wherever we go these days. Each time we click on a website, or buy something, sign up to a newsletter or interact with an organisation, we produce data that, when aggregated and analysed, can reveal trends about our behaviour.

It's a challenge that the housing sector is coming to terms with tackling. Collecting data is one thing; using it to best effect in decision making is an entirely different challenge. As a whole, the sector is slightly behind the curve in terms of collecting and using data to predict trends and thus to deliver tailored services for tenants.

So what can housing providers learn from building up data over time? What trends can they identify and how might that information help them to provide the ultimate housing solution for tenants? Last year, a group of housing providers put their heads together and decided to pool their data in order to understand better the trends within the sector. The housing charity HACT and a group of 16 housing providers, with around 400,000 homes between them, collaborated so that the volume of data would provide useful insights.

Arrears & repairs

When pooled in a vault in the cloud with strict security protocols so that residents' data couldn't be identified, the providers were able to cross-reference rent arrears information about tenants with other sets of data such as location, types of property and information about the tenants themselves in terms of how often they accessed services from their provider. This created a way to spot underlying issues that, when highlighted early enough, could be addressed to reduce the number of tenants falling into arrears. Prevention is always better than cure. Predicting that tenants fitting a specific profile might default on their rent payments gives the provider an ability to stop it happening before it becomes a problem. It highlights those tenants that need the most support before they actually need it, and importantly for the provider, gives them a starting point that may help to reduce rent arrears.

In the same way, predicting repairs in certain types of properties is finally becoming a reality. As we collect more data, it's possible to determine in what type of property to invest in the future based on returns on investments and longevity of use. Some housing providers do a full stock review, looking at what their costs are, consolidating any loans and validating repairs against the assets.

For example, if the rent collected is £50 per week and repairs cost more than £200 each month, the housing provider is more able to decide what type of properties deliver the best return by accounting for the depreciation of their assets, and investing more wisely in the right type of properties in the future. For bigger housing providers, it provides efficiency savings, but it's not beyond the pale to suggest that for smaller housing providers, analytics are increasingly important – especially those in deprived areas where there is very little room for manoeuvre in rent vs. costs.

Even down to the basics, such as when will the boiler need replacing, the house needs a new roof or the windows need updating, it's all costs that stack up against the rent that's collected, and ultimately leaves the housing provider with difficult decisions to make. Predicting costs more accurately thanks to data analytics helps manage this before the costs are incurred and allows a change in strategy to counteract them.

Penalising tenants

Of course, with every up-side, there are the challenges. One might suggest that if we are increasingly able to predict rent arrears or even anti-social behaviour from tenants more easily from trends in the data we analyse, then there is a greater risk of penalising or even denying a tenant their tenancy. It's easy to argue that the increased information allows us to better support the tenant, but there is always a risk it may be used in the wrong way.

Could landlords rent properties to one tenant over another, based on their propensity for some of these wider issues? It throws up some uncomfortable questions. Likewise, if a tenant is currently unemployed and spends more time in their property, is there a connection with an increase in repairs due to more wear and tear on the property? The data may suggest so, providing the landlord with the evidence to choose tenants based on the information to hand. In the main, I believe that landlords will responsibly put their estates in order, rather than penalise their tenants. Understanding the difficulties simply means housing providers are better equipped to provide the right advice and course of action before it's critical.

Cost-benefit analysis

Of course, the costs of big data must be balanced against the benefits of mining the information for decision-making purposes. Storing data in large warehouses is often expensive and can become more costly if not done correctly from the beginning. The use of a data warehouse allows several products to access data from several systems without having all the information in one single database. But a data warehouse that hasn't been assembled correctly can be a big headache. In housing, it's often used for reporting or for passing data been CRM, asset management and/or mobile devices. For us, the point at which a customer tells us they have a data warehouse is often a pivotal moment, with potential additional risks. If systems show differing values that simply don't marry up, costs can spiral.

There are many components to consider; there is the amount of storage space,

DATA IS A CURRENCY – SPEND IT WISELY

Continued from previous page

maintaining the information, consultancy fees, hidden costs in terms of time, the mobile costs to achieve it and, ultimately, the data must be put to good use. And of course, our biggest fear is always the cost and time it can take to run relevant reports from the data warehouse. There must be a serious amount of computational power to run reports freely from that amount of data backed up over years. I wouldn't recommend running it over the main company network as that would quickly render it useless for hours, hence the associated costs of an entirely separate infrastructure just for data analysis. The list of costs can be endless, and are they worth the output?

The future internet of things

As we link more devices to the internet and they generate increasing amounts of data, it's not difficult to predict that in the future big data and analytics will become more central to business strategy. But in order to eradicate costs, sifting of data will be increasingly important. Which parts of your data do you want and need to extract, versus the parts that are less valuable to your business? Which data will provide the most return on investment?

Like any currency, it's important to make sure that it's valuable to you. Our advice to housing providers is look at

the big picture and focus on where changes could be made to bring about efficiencies, and gradually introduce these, rather than doing too much all at once.

Chris McLaughlin is managing director of MIS AMS.

Blackpool Coastal Housing implements Neighbourhub

Blackpool Coastal Housing has selected Neighbourhub, a partnership between Places for People and Visualmetrics, to enhance its commercial performance and the sustainability of its neighbourhoods.

The Neighbourhub analytical software is now live and supplying trusted information aligned to user demands and in support of BCH's neighbourhood strategy.

The software automates the integration of data from BCH's source applications and distributes the information needed for informed decision-making through the Neighbourhub dashboard, summary reports, drill-to-detail and ad-hoc query capabilities.

The KPIs being collected and reported using Neighbourhub include surplus per property, rent arrears and rent collected, turnover, re-lets, voids, repairs, tenancy duration, ASB, tenancy breaches and housing benefits.

SDS celebrates 20 years of ProVal

One of the social housing sector's most enduring viability assessment tools, ProVal LS from SDS, is celebrating its 20th birthday.

ProVal was the brainchild of SDS's late founder, David Shelton, who wrote the original programme in 1996. At the time, very little appraisal software existed and ProVal helped local councils and housing providers to assess the viability of projects in real time. The software is now being used by 350 housing providers and 40 local authorities.

The software forecasts NPV and IRR and long-term cash flow by tenure, unit and scheme. It also consolidates multiple schemes or phases into one appraisal.

EQUITY HOUSING CUTS ARREARS WITH RENTSENSE

Mobysoft's Rentsense software is being used by Equity Housing Group to reduce its arrears caseload from 1,000 cases per week to just 250.

Before the introduction of Rentsense, Equity Housing took a list-based approach to arrears because its housing management system was ineffective for making recommendations about which arrears cases should be investigated.

Jonathan Brownbill, financial inclusion manager, Equity Housing Group, said, "Housing management systems tend to focus on a 'staircase' escalation approach which can be easily upset by complexities. Feedback from our housing officers highlighted that they were spending a lot of time checking cases that needed no action and that process took two to three minutes per record."

Equity was also aware that ongoing welfare reform and the advent of universal credit would greatly impact officers' workloads and the time taken to manage their caseloads.

Brownbill said, "We needed Rentsense to help free up capacity, enabling our officers to spend more time with tenants who need them, focusing on both support and enforcement where appropriate."

As well as the large reduction in arrears cases each week, Equity Housing's overall arrears have fallen from 1.2 per cent (2014/15) to 0.8 per cent (2015/16).

Brownbill said, "As an income team, you simply want to know who is in arrears, and then who is getting worse and by how much. Traditional housing management systems are not effective at doing this, but Rentsense is. Its interface is simple to use, you can select and design your own priorities and bandings, and it supports agile working.

"We have found that Rentsense instils an officer culture around caseload completion which really works and brings the team together around a collective aim."

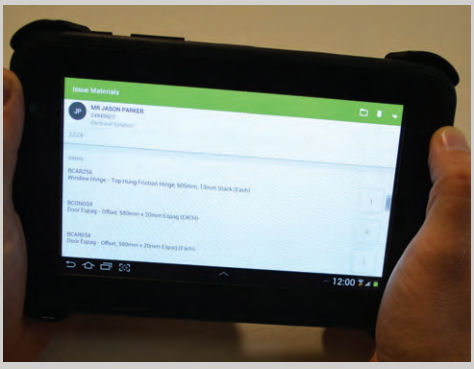
MOBILE WORKING

MERLIN HOUSING'S REAL-TIME STOCK ORDERING WITH TRAVIS PERKINS

Travis Perkins has won a £6 million materials contract with Merlin Housing Society over the next five years, with the aim of reducing void times and increasing the number of repairs carried out each day.

Tablet devices will be used to keep track of the materials used for every repair. The automated system will then order new stock which will be sent direct to the operative every week. And after a tenancy ends, each property will receive a bespoke property pack from Travis Perkins, comprising everything needed to bring it up to a lettable standard.

Stephen Williams, general manager of property solutions, Merlin Housing, said, "Getting repairs right first time is so important, and making sure our operatives have everything they need to carry out repairs is key to this.



"To prepare for the new contract, over the past six months we've been conducting an in-depth audit of all the stock that operatives carry in their vans and how often they're using each item. The contract with Travis Perkins means we will have a more integrated and efficient process so that our operatives will never be short of the materials they need in their van to complete a repair first time."

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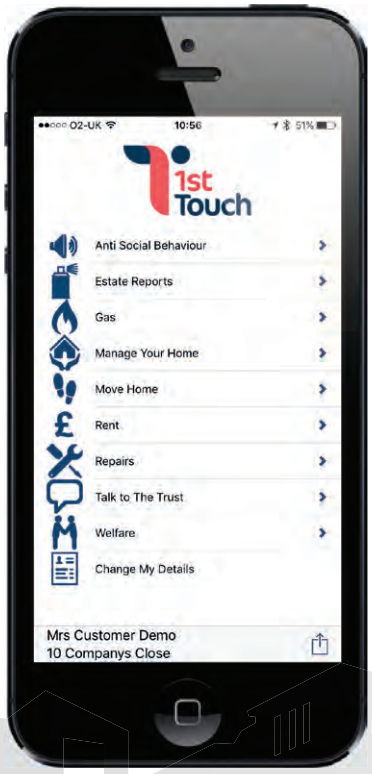

Self-Service App

Give your customers all the tenancy information they need to empower them to take action. With a wealth of information and action-based functionality, the app digitally transforms your customer interface, delivering optimal tenant engagement experience. Customers can also take and submit pictures and GPS locations that you need to be aware of, or are prompted to call the emergency services where it is more appropriate. This reduces the pressure on call-centre operation and drives efficient working practices.

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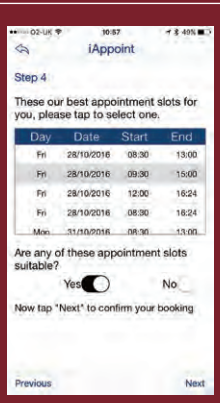
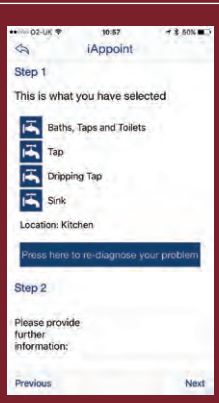
1st Touch

Self-service iAppoint scheduling from 1st Touch

1st Touch has launched iAppoint, a self-service module to streamline customer appointment scheduling by speeding up and improving the processes involved. The company reported that online appointment bookings made using iAppoint cost less than £1 compared with £6-10 for bookings made via call centres.

By integrating with a housing provider's back-office systems, iAppoint aggregates all the key data relating to a tenant, their property and the housing provider's resources and combines it with an online self-service appointment system. Tenants can schedule their preferred appointment, either through a visiting field operative's device or online through their housing provider's self-service portal or app.





Once made, appointments are then confirmed to the tenant by text in advance. The text advice system can be tailored to add the name and photo of the visiting staff member, along with an estimated time of arrival and their contact details. In addition to booking the appointment, the tenants can also prioritise or rearrange the appointments made, order additional text reminders and book any follow-up actions.

Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch, said, "Automating the scheduling function is a significant step forward both in terms of customer service and efficiency. From our own research, we know that housing providers that invest in this kind of technology will see a significant customer-service dividend as well as save over £6 for every appointment made online."

FIRST WESSEX GETS AGILE WITH CASTLETON

First Wessex has implemented Castleton Technology's Agile Tenancy and Income Management application to enable more mobile working and support the housing provider's 'digital first' approach.

Tracey Spargo, business systems manager, First Wessex, said, "Our neighbourhoods and income teams now have access to information from our Orchard housing management system on smart phones and tablets. The application provides the teams with all the information they need when they're working on our estates, enabling them to give residents rent account information and also directly update information held about our tenants in Orchard, raise repairs and capture signatures."

Emily Brown, neighbourhood services manager, First Wessex, added, "The neighbourhoods team can now access information without needing to come into the offices. We are now looking at more processes which could be improved using the Agile Tenancy app to give staff even more flexibility and information when they are out of the office."

Sovereign brings repairs in-house

Sovereign Housing is bringing all of its repairs service in-house, using software from ROCC and Kirona.

While the majority of repairs for Sovereign's 38,000-homes were already delivered by Sovereign Response, its in-house repairs team, this service has now been extended to its 8,000 homes across Hampshire from October 2016.

With reduced costs and increased productivity, the service is expected to break even within one year before making significant savings over the next five years.

Colin Gallaugher, Sovereign's Head of Operations, said: "Given the success of Sovereign Response across the majority of our region, as well as pressure on budgets, we felt it was time to review our existing contracts."

THE AGENT FOR CHANGE

Greg Johns, CEO, 1st Touch

I have always been impressed by the way that new IT developments evolve from some high technology test-bed into crucial business applications. By offering to deliver hitherto unattainable business benefits, these IT developments quickly become an agent for change, as existing systems start to incorporate the next big thing.

As we all recall, mobile workforce technology itself was originally ground-breaking and unproven, yet it's now at the heart of most housing providers' technology estate. Rolling forward to much later technologies, we are seeing how IoT can potentially deliver huge benefits in areas such as boiler management, security and tenant broadband.

However, while it's one thing to look at how technology affects your own industry once it arrives, it's possible a far more useful task is to study how technological advances that have worked well elsewhere might bring benefits to social housing. By studying what has worked well in other sectors, there are often benefits that we can translate into our own sector as an agent for change. This near-future predictive analysis is incredibly valuable because it reveals a rich landscape of opportunities, both in terms of driving efficiency and boosting customer service.

I think there are fundamental lessons to be learnt from high-profile social media, app developers and data scientists in the consumer world. Potentially, these hold considerable promise for housing providers and their tenants. 1st Touch is currently studying how we can incorporate some of these ideas into our own systems, with our '2020 vision' based around the idea of how great technology from one sector could be used to excellent effect in social housing.

For example, let's look at Uber, famed as being the world's largest and fastest growing driver hire operator. While not actually owning any hire vehicles themselves, their online app-based ordering model has been incredibly disruptive to traditional taxi service providers around the world.

To me, the really impressive thing is that the whole online operation behind Uber uses near-live interaction. Customers who book a cab using their smartphone or other GPS-enabled handheld device are sent details of the selected car and driver and receive an estimated arrival time alongside other information relevant to their trip.

Surely, this approach can also drive standards in social housing. For example, it could make a huge difference to appointment scheduling systems. Tenants should be able to go online 24/7/365 via a housing provider's portal or app and enter a request for, say, a responsive repairs operative to attend or a visit from a housing officer. Like Uber, this appointment would then be confirmed to tenants by text. On the day of dispatch, using the Uber model, tenants could also be sent a photo of the mobile operative, their name, an estimated arrival time and even the registration number of their vehicle. This would greatly reduce the number of failed visits and significantly boost customer perceptions.

Such approaches prove the validity of productive self-service apps for customer use. One only has to look at the online bank Atom. It has no branches. All its customer's financial transactions are made through an app and consequently the service levels are the same quality 24/7/365. This shines a clear light for the potential of future app developments in social housing.

One can see other lessons that can be learnt from the mainstream. For example, Experian is using big data and extremely clever algorithms to predict the likelihood of people falling into debt. To achieve this, they use trend analysis to extremely good effect. Surely then, it's very possible for housing providers to use similar techniques to identify those people who are vulnerable, likely to fall into arrears, require maintenance or that have boilers in need of replacement.

Interestingly, from our own research, we've seen that missed gas appointments have a strong correlation to rent arrears, so the use of statistical analysis is very relevant to social housing. To ensure that that this data analysis is truly useful, it's essential that the data is both cleaned and validated to a high level of quality and it's equally important that sophisticated algorithms are designed to predict and analyse behaviour. Once this is done, the clever part is interpreting the data effectively and coding it into an app.

Given this, there is huge potential for predictive analytics, based on trends and algorithms, to make a real difference both to tenants in customer service terms and to housing providers looking to drive value for money.

Overall, the continuous evolution of technology is not just an agent for change, it's also an agent for continuous improvements to service delivery. As the ultimate beneficiary is the tenant, then in keeping with our 2020 vision strategy, we will keep looking for new technologies that improve their tenancies even further.

Greg Johns is CEO of 1st Touch.

First Choice saves £750k on repairs and maintenance

Since partnering with First Choice Homes Oldham during the last two years, a combined solution from ROCC and Kirona has helped the housing provider to save more than £750,000 in the delivery of repairs and maintenance.

Stephen Repton, assistant director for business transformation, First Choice Homes Oldham, said, "The ROCC solution has really transformed the way we operate. The agility of the solution has contributed towards a cultural change in the way operatives receive and complete repair orders.

"Having a greater level of intelligence from the system means we can use it to inform and drive business decisions, and it will also be an enabler for self-service and channel shift in future."

Siobhan McCoy, general manager for FCHO's Property Care service, said, "With our previous system, we had to make the process or service fit the system. The implementation of the ROCC system enabled us to take a step back and redesign our processes to be logical and efficient from end-to-end."

FCHO's full solution comprises ROCC Uniclass integrated with Kirona's DRS, Web Booking Manager and Job Manager Mobile.

McCoy said, "The financial benefits have been incredible. In total, we have saved in the region of £750,000 within the first two years of partnering with ROCC and Kirona."

The saving are made up from £40,000 on fuel, £50,000 in paper-based data inputting, £200,000 on staffing, £37,000 from reduced voids and £420,000 of increased productivity.

CUSTOMER MANAGEMENT

SASSHA SIGNS ASHTON PIONEER HOMES FOR CRM

Ashton Pioneer Homes has installed mobile-enabled ICE Cube customer relationship management software from SASSHA.

The introduction of the SASSHA CRM Cube has improved internal communications and is also being used as a management monitoring tool. Users have their own dashboard to view outstanding tasks while managers have a dashboard to provide an overview of activity and performance. The CRM Cube has become the hub of the housing management system, with the added benefit of being fully mobile and available on any device.

Clare Leader, customer service manager, Ashton Pioneer Homes, said, "It has completely changed the way we work and is improving the service we provide to customers."

One of the company's housing officers added, "CRM is really easy to use. It helps to keep track of work by sending the task via CRM instead of email, and there is a thread that tracks the work that has been completed, by whom and when. It also allows managers to actively view the work being carried out by their staff and passed between different teams, highlighting areas of good practice or operational concerns."

David Harrison, technical director, SASSHA Software, said, "The CRM Cube has been adapted to fit the needs of Ashton Pioneer Homes, with many changes being live within hours of being requested. They also worked with us on development of the Property Survey Cube, allowing real-time void and general property inspections using a mobile device with one-click navigation."

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FUTURES HOUSING'S UNIFIED & MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS – IT'S ALL ABOUT CHANGE

Gavin Hitchcock, Head of ICT, Futures Housing Group

Futures Housing Group continues its drive to create effortless customer experiences and revolutionise its operating model using Microsoft Skype for Business and Enghouse Interactive Contact Centre (EICC).

In this third article in a series of four (see Housing Technology, July & September 2016 issues, for the two previous articles), Gavin Hitchcock, head of ICT at Futures Housing Group, explains how the project progressed during September and October 2016 as it moves into the cultural change and change management aspects and preparations continue for 'go-live' in November and December 2016.

The renowned MIT lecturer Peter Senge once said, "People don't resist change. They resist being changed." For this reason and due to the significant changes of this project and the impact they will have on the working practices of Futures Housing's staff, it was essential to capture their attention and gain their buy-in and support.

While the technical builds of the contact centre system were being completed, queues set up, messages pre-recorded and agent configurations finalised and tested ready for the system go-live in November, the project team worked with

Futures Housing's communications team to deliver a series of awareness activities for staff across the group.

Alex Kellett, who led the internal communications for the project, said, "It was clear that this project was going to revolutionise the way we operate. Having explored that theme, we chose the idea of using Che Guevara-esque propaganda to bring the campaign to life.

"We were really happy with the style we came up with. It was vibrant, exciting and nothing like we'd ever done before. We applied the style to all of our internal communication channels, such as our intranet, digital signage, posters and emails, with bespoke dossiers for each member of staff to tell them all about the new technology.

"We added gloss to the campaign by decorating the training room with props from a nearby army surplus store. It looked great and staff were talking about it, which was the whole point of doing it."

A series of cultural change, education and awareness activities were launched during September and October to increase the overall awareness of the project and to gently introduce the changes to our culture and working practices in a fun, innovative and informative manner.

A total of 35 volunteers from across the group were invited to 'boot camps' where they were trained and given the Skype system for their day-to-day operational use. These 'Skype ambassadors' were then available across the group as the 'go to' people and as advocates for using Skype.

The staff were invited to a series of 'join the revolution' events where they could have a go and see the new equipment they would be using. Post-event surveys indicated the events had been well received with nine out of 10 staff feeling excited about the changes, and 85 per cent having a better understanding of the project and its objectives.

A range of communication and awareness initiatives were carried out on a regular basis to maintain momentum and ensure staff were kept up-to-date. It was also important to recognise that not all staff were office-based and a range of techniques were used to ensure everyone was 'touched' by these communications.

A series of very well received internal blogs were published on our intranet by project manager Chris Cheetham who addressed important issues in a blog titled "Do I really need a phone on my desk?" In the blog, he eased fears about telephone headsets messing up

FUTURES HOUSING'S UNIFIED & MULTI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS – IT'S ALL ABOUT CHANGE

Continued from previous page

his hairstyle, looking like Britney Spears when wearing one, and how he had been apprehensive about losing his desk phone, but having got used to the system, he would never go back to that 'lump of plastic sat on the desk'.

Taking a personalised approach, the communications team also put together information and educational materials based on different persona groups among the staff. This approach led to tailored boot camps for all staff, where they were given introductory training based on how they would use the unified communications system. For example, a mobile worker would have much more time allocated to using Skype on a mobile device, compared to an office/ desk-based worker who would use desk-based equipment instead.

During these sessions, all staff selected their choice of headset and left the boot camp ready to join the revolution. These sessions were classed as 'soft launch' events to gently introduce staff to Skype and enable them to start using it for telephony, instant messaging and desktop collaboration in parallel with the group's existing legacy telephone system, which will be decommissioned in December 2016. As of October 2016, over 200 members of staff have attended a session, with four one-hour sessions running every day.

While the change and communication campaign encouraged staff to join the revolution, the technical build, configuration and testing work marched on.

In addition to finalising the EICC build in preparation for it going live in November, the Skype system underwent final snagging. Integration with our Orchard housing management system is continuing, in order to deliver inbound contact identification, 'screen pop' and data capture for telephone, email, SMS, web chat and social media. The overall unified and multi-channel communications solution includes contact centre call recording using Enghouse's QMS system; this system is currently being built and tested for go-live later this year.

The final pieces in the jigsaw include a pilot exercise to test the proposed desktop solution for partially- and fully-mobile members of staff. The full utilisation of Skype, including video conferencing capabilities, will also be enabled, and our offices and meeting rooms are also being assessed for video-conferencing equipment.

Looking ahead, it's going to be very busy as we approach Christmas and the New Year and migrate the unified and multi-channel communications solution into live operational use. We will continue to encourage Futures' staff to 'join the revolution' and embrace the change and opportunities offered by the new systems to improve the services we offer to customers, while revolutionising the group's operating model.

Gavin Hitchcock is head of ICT at Futures Housing Group.

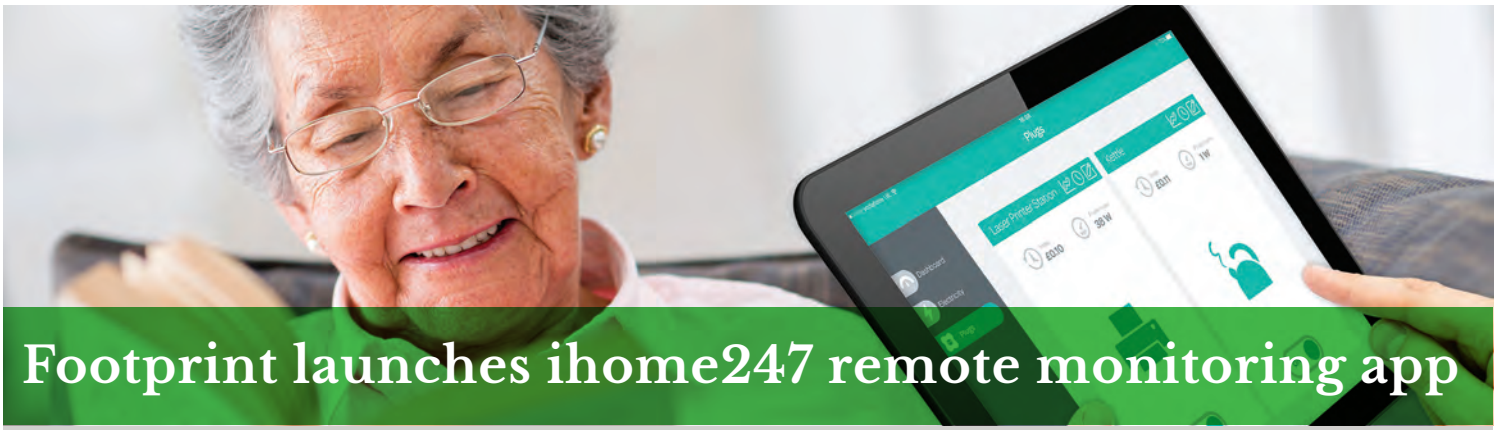
Omni-channel Accent with MIS AMS

Accent Group has taken another step closer to providing multi-channel access to customer services for its tenants by integrating ActiveH CRM from MIS-AMS into its new UK contact centre as well as providing a tenant portal.

The housing provider, which in 2012 brought three separate organisations together onto a single ActiveH housing management system, has since launched its new contact centre. ActiveH CRM now gives Accent a single 360-degree view of its properties and tenants, with plans to develop an omni-channel experience through integration with a new telephony and technology platform.

Andrew Kidds, head of customer contact, Accent Group, said, "ActiveH provides one set of data and a single interface for our front-line teams to use, which gives us an invaluable single view of the customer. We can now make every conversation we have with tenants count because the CRM solution has the ability to provide a first-call resolution on most issues.

"Plus, since we launched our digital self-service portal last year, we now have 3,800 customers who have set up a live account and can report repairs online, get access to rent statements and rent account information as well as being able to report anti-social behaviour."



Footprint launches ihome247 remote monitoring app

In response to reports that frail and elderly people are still subject to 'flying visits' as a result of increasing pressure on social care services, Footprint Solutions has launched a new application that delivers discreet and effective remote monitoring of well-being.

Footprint said that ihome247 would transform the way in which relatives and care workers monitor the well-being of residents by installing and monitoring devices to track appliance, electricity and water usage. The application plots trend graphs based on general patterns to identify regular appliance usage, such as when a kettle is turned on. If a user hasn't made their morning cup of tea, switched on the lights or flushed the loo, an alert will be raised on the app and an SMS sent to a nominated contact.

John Sant, CEO, Footprint Solutions, said, "ihome247 was born out of the need to modernise out-dated telecare services. The volume of unnecessary home calls is causing a huge strain on local support services. Users find telecare services to be invasive and unwelcome, and many are relieved when we throw the switch in favour of ihome247."

The ihome247 devices only take an hour to install and include a diverse range of monitoring aids such as motion sensors, intelligent sockets, panic buttons and door-entry keypads. The overall solution, including hardware, installation and support, is covered by a single monthly subscription rather than high upfront costs.

Peter Fitzhenry, CEO, Housing Support Pro, said, "We have adopted ihome247 as our standard assisted-living solution. The early indications from our customers who are piloting the solution is that it modernises out-dated telecare services while providing more accurate and valued feedback throughout the day, rather than checking on the vulnerable once or twice a day."

HYDE GROUP BETTER OFF WITH LOOKINGLOCAL

Hyde Group has become the first housing provider to use LookingLocal's BetterOff online platform which brings benefits and employment together in a single digital space.

BetterOff, developed by Kirklees Council's digital team LookingLocal, combines benefits eligibility, applications, appeals and comprehensive employment tools. LookingLocal said that it helps to ensure tenants are aware of and can claim the benefits they're entitled to, have improved job prospects, and can pay their rent on time.

Jahanara Rajkoomar, head of community investment, Hyde Group, said, "We are working towards digitally transforming most of our current services as we recognise that tenants increasingly want to access services and information online. Wherever possible, we want to offer tenants a self-service option, so BetterOff seemed a good fit. On average, we expect residents using BetterOff to gain £635 each in unclaimed benefits."

PORTAL-AS-A-SERVICE FROM VERSEONE

VerseOne has just released a software-as-a-service (SaaS) version of its Datafish tenant portal software.

The company said that until now, having an online customer portal has been generally limited to housing providers with sufficient financial resources to deploy this key component of digital transformation. By offering its Datafish portal software as a monthly subscription service, VerseOne expects to attract housing customers with more modest budgets but still wanting to offer their tenants access to online housing services.

Alan Neilson, founder and executive chairman, VerseOne, said, "By offering the Datafish secure portal via a SaaS model, and providing a number of packages designed to suit the needs of different types and sizes of organisation, we hope to bring the benefits of digital transformation to a greater number of large and small housing providers and their tenants."

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OCTAVIA INTERVIEW – OUTCOME-LED SERVICE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE AND REPORTING

Sue Lyons, CEO, Octavia Software Solutions

octavia software solutions

Housing Technology recently interviewed Octavia Software Solutions' CEO, Sue Lyons, on how housing providers, local authorities and voluntary organisations are using OSKA, the company's software package for outcome-led services delivery and reporting.

What does Octavia do in the housing sector?

We supply a software solution called OSKA that is predominantly an outcome monitoring tool which provides up-to-the minute operational management information against people-based contracts. This is particularly relevant for the increasing number of organisations who engage with their tenants through intensive housing management and sustainable tenancy management. Using OSKA, you can build an entire episode of support for an individual that might include financial inclusion, sustaining accommodation or health and wellbeing. You can record all stages of the process from waiting list to outcome and it will generally include risk assessments, safeguarding and staff hours.

Achieving positive outcomes by monitoring performance against contract and having the data available to shape their business through capacity planning are some of the advantages that our customers get from using OSKA.

How does Octavia differ from its competitors?

We are a Microsoft Partner and our products are developed using the most up-to-date .Net technology. This also means we have full integration with other Microsoft products, such as Microsoft Office for emails, letters and calendar functions and Microsoft Dynamics for operational processing.

The level of flexibility that our software delivers is unique in the sector. We can supply a simple data-collection package or a complex security-driven solution, cloud-based or on-premise, stand-alone or integrated with other business applications. Our customers range from the largest providers of outcome-led services to the smallest domestic violence organisations, all achieved with the one solution configured to suit the individual needs of each customer.

Midland Heart is a great example of how the advanced security features can work. It needed to restrict access to records, functionality and data to suit the requirements of the teams that deliver specialist support and extra-care services across Birmingham. OSKA provides this across a set of input screens to remote and onsite staff, enabling each episode of support to be recorded as it's delivered while ensuring that access is only permitted to those with the correct level of authorisation.

Over the years, we have worked with sector experts to build modules that deal with all aspects of outcome-based service delivery and the associated contract management. Our latest developments have, of course, involved mobile delivery options such as digital forms, cloud-based access and storage. These have enabled our customers to have all service-related data in one database, making data retrieval for reporting, creating digital templates or linking to data warehouses a very straightforward process.

A key aspect of the benefits that our products deliver is the 'up to the minute' operational and management reports which result in significant time and financial savings for our customers.

Can you explain Octavia's main application areas?

Outcome-led service delivery is, without question, the most used area of our software. In summary, it provides all the tools needed to record a complete history of an individual's service episode. The services our customers are providing vary, but they could include the delivery of supported housing to older people, care, support and general living assistance in the form of tenancy sustainment or intensive housing management to all tenants and workplace skills courses to young people.

OSKA captures the data required to evidence service delivery, quality and compliance, all of which are key factors in our customers winning new contracts and to Octavia's continued success in the sector. In addition to the contract deliverables, the data recorded is often used for benchmarking across services and for staff performance reviews.

Our mobile options include a unique tablet solution that truly works offline, with no synchronisation required. Digital forms are designed to capture only the data needed for a particular type of visit, and they can include intelligent links to send instant alerts to other departments, and pre-populated forms and drop-down

OCTAVIA INTERVIEW – OUTCOME-LED SERVICE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE AND REPORTING

Continued from previous page

lists reduce the input even further. Our customers are seeing considerable time savings and a marked improvement in data accuracy.

Another benefit is that staff and clients love using the tablet; it removes the barrier that laptops introduced and is giving staff more time to spend with clients.

What's new at Octavia that housing providers should know about?

The release of OSKA+, our cloud solution; this has taken the tried-and-tested OSKA into the cloud, providing a web-based system available on any device. The real advantage of OSKA+ is its simplicity. The sign-up process can happen within hours of purchase, no installation is required, and user input screens are simple and uncluttered and accessed via an email address. Once logged in, all case note data is available to the user, security permitting.

OSKA+ fits very well with both long- and short-term contracts because very little time needs to be invested in the deployment of the solution. Reporting from the system is also very straightforward as all data resides in a SQL database. We also offer a report writing service to complete the solution.

Please describe a 'typical' Octavia customer

Octavia has two types of typical customer; housing providers, ranging in size from the largest housing organisations to the smallest YMCAs, and voluntary organisations such as women's aid and domestic violence service providers.

Housing organisations typically use OSKA to manage services such as older people's services, training and workplace skills or care and support. An interface to and from the organisation's housing management system keeps the records synchronised and provides data for reporting across an entire case.

An example would be BPHA for whom implementing OSKA has completely changed the way it delivers care and support services, helping it to survive in today's lean housing sector. OSKA has enabled staff at BPHA to maximise the time they spend with clients, giving them the ability to manage their own diaries and minimise the administrative burden. Accurate and up-to-the-minute management reports are saving on operational management time.

Voluntary organisations use OSKA to manage their outcome-based services and would also use the CRM and charge modules. The time and cost savings that our digital forms solution deliver have made it a popular option for the voluntary sector.

Who are the key figures at Octavia?

I head up the company and my background is originally in software and process design for applications used within the National Health Service. In the mid-90s, I moved into the social housing sector to help housing providers with the selection and implementation of business systems, predominantly for housing management and finance. By 1999, I had designed a system to manage young people's services and worked with a developer to create Octavia's first product. It progressed quickly to address the Supporting People 'movement'. In addition to leading the development and growth of Octavia, I have continued to work as a consultant within the sector. My continued involvement with IT projects such as system integrations for large mergers and in smaller projects to streamline processes and digitise departments has kept me up-to-date with the changing requirements of the sector and has been key to the on-going development of our product range. The key requirement is generally to save organisations time and money while producing accurate data.

Paul Gamble is our senior developer and has been developing software for Octavia since 2005 when he joined to lead our first .Net project. Liam Maggs leads on support and implementation, and he has many years' experience of our products and helps our customers to get the most from the software.

We also have access to sector experts to call on for specialist projects and trusted consultants who we have worked with over the years.

Who are Octavia's partners, and how do they fit into housing providers' IT infrastructures?

Octavia is a Microsoft partner and this ensures that our development tools are up-to-date and provides a framework for our developers to keep their skills current. It also means we are a good fit for delivering applications to the housing sector as the Microsoft route seems to be the most popular.

Riverlite partners with Octavia to provide data-hosting services to ISO-27001 certification and Tier 3 security standards and because all of its data centres are based in the UK, it sits well within the housing sector's policy of keeping data within the UK.

We partner with a number of the leading providers of housing management software to achieve a fully-integrated solution that gives a 360-degree view of an organisation's properties and tenants. Octavia uses the services of Manifest to interface OSKA to other sector solutions.

What are your future plans?

Our plan at Octavia is to make the sector more aware of our products and the benefits the software delivers; I think OSKA is one of the housing sector's little-known gems!

In terms of our product development, we will continue to update and develop the software to meet the changing requirements of the sector. Our development plans include an archive solution that can sit behind any system. Our marketing attention will be firmly focused on promoting the release of OSKA+; its flexibility and 'sign-up and go' model delivers an affordable solution to today's housing sector that demands instant access to quality data.

Sue Lyons is CEO of Octavia Software Solutions.

NUDGING YOUR WAY TO CHANNEL SHIFT

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL THROUGH EVIDENCE-BASED BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE

Mike Eckersley, Business Change & Project Manager, Capita Software Services

Eight housing providers have joined forces with Capita for a ground-breaking collaborative research project using 'nudge' theory to promote channel shift in their organisations.

Following Capita's recent behavioural insight project, 'Nudging your way to reduced rent arrears', a new programme has been launched using the same approach to achieve channel shift among tenants, encouraging them to access the various services they need online. The premise? By applying nudge theory to channel shift, businesses can use this tried-and-tested method to help them achieve their targets of reducing costs and improving customer engagement.

What is nudge theory?

Nudge theory is a multi-disciplinary approach to the applied science of human behaviour. It suggests that positive reinforcement of behaviours, coupled with hints and suggestions, can influence motivation, collaboration, and decision processes. Nudges towards the 'preferred' behaviour can often be more effective, and less prone to resistance from groups or individuals, than direct instruction or overt enforcement.

Until now, supporting channel shift strategies has prioritised the back-office technical platforms and functionality to allow them to offer new, self-service channels, along with the cultural change inside the organisation required to make it happen. But what about improving buy-in and encouraging channel shift on the outside of the organisation?

This new project embraces a 360-degree approach in encouraging channel shift, by applying nudge theory and behavioural insights to change customer behaviour and shift them to the new, self-service channels that are being made available. This is a more proactive approach than the passive 'if you build it, they will come' tone organisations may have taken in the past.

What does the nudge programme promise?

In embarking on the new research project, each participant organisation has identified a need to maximise their resources and reduce costs, both of which can certainly be achieved by successful channel shift. The programme will support them in developing really effective strategies to change the way their customers transact with them, and help them achieve these much-needed efficiencies.

Nudge theory isn't just a great idea, it has been proven to work and demonstrates some truly impressive results. The BBC introduced similar principles in promoting customer self-service for its TV Licence fee collection contract, a project run by Capita on behalf of the government. Following the introduction of nudge theory and strategies to support it, the BBC has seen a 20 per cent reduction in TV Licence evasion, a 40 per cent reduction in costs vs. income and a 20 per cent reduction in headcount.

By bringing together this experience, our deep knowledge of the housing sector, and our participants' knowledge and understanding of their customers, we believe that this programme could realise annual six-figure savings for the participating organisations.

If this sounds optimistic, the following figures make a compelling case for the impact channel shift really can achieve:

CONTACT TYPE	AVERAGE COST	VOLUME BEFORE CHANNEL SHIFT	COST BEFORE CHANNEL SHIFT	VOLUME (50%) AFTER CHANNEL SHIFT	COST AFTER CHANNEL SHIFT
FACE-TO-FACE	£8.60	7,000	£60,200	3,500	£30,100
CONTACT CENTRE	£2.80	79,000	£221,200	39,500	£110,600
WEBSITE	£0.15	N/A	N/A	43,000	£6,450
TOTAL		**86,000**	**£281,400**	**86,000**	**£147,150**
SAVING					**£134,250**

NUDGING YOUR WAY TO CHANNEL SHIFT

Continued from previous page

A 50 per cent shift of tenants from face-to-face (estimated at £8.60 per transaction) and contact centre transactions (£2.80) to online self-service (costing just £0.15 per transaction) results in an annual saving of nearly £135,000. These figures are based on annual call-centre volumes of around 79,000 calls per year – if an organisation's call centre takes more calls than that, the saving is even bigger. A housing provider that takes 300,000 calls each year would be looking at savings over £400,000 annually from the same 50 per cent shift.

The nudge programme

Nudging your way to channel shift comprises a series of hands-on workshops and events based over a 12-month period, during which the participating organisations' staff will learn about the application of behavioural science and customer profiling and segmentation. They will design different nudge interventions for their customers, and then will take part in randomised controlled trials of these in real time. These trials really are the gold standard in evidence-based decision making, and will allow them to see exactly what effect their interventions have had on channel-shift for their customers.

This proven methodology will help organisations shift even the toughest mind-sets within their customer base to affect sustainable and real change.

Mike Eckersley is a business change and project manager for Capita Software Services.

FLAGSHIP PIONEERS DRONES FOR INSPECTIONS

From April 2017, Flagship Group's RFT Services will use drones to survey specialist roofs as part of their property maintenance and repairs programme, instead of using scaffolding on non-standard, taller properties. Data from the drones is then linked to Flagship's Orbis mapping system.

As an alternative to expensive equipment such as static scaffolds or mobile evaluated working platforms, the use of drones could save Flagship up to 70 per cent of the cost of traditional methods to inspect a property. Flagship's in-house legal team are also planning to use drones in boundary disputes as a cheaper and better alternative to aerial surveys.

A pilot project carried out in Dereham in September 2016 was a huge success, leading to the permanent implementation of drones. The drones are owned and operated by Sky Cam East.

Julian Roberts, field manager, RFT Services, said, "Embracing new technologies means we can improve our service to tenants as there will be less inconvenience to them. The drones will also reduce the risk to our operatives from unnecessarily working at height, and they will also save on scaffolding costs for larger roof inspections."

The new way of working came to fruition after Flagship's IT department, supported by the group's legal department and RFT Services, identified a technological solution when reviewing the maintenance programme.

Matt Brazier, head of IT, Flagship Group, said: "I think the fact that we approach change in a very non-traditional way allowed us to achieve something the sector probably wouldn't have thought achievable. By running a pilot scheme instead of using the same resources to build a traditional business case, we were able to explore what was possible by learning from real world experiences.

"In time, we're hoping the drones can be used by our surveyors to look at stock conditions and plan a programme of works, instead of reacting when an issue has been reported. This will allow us to diagnose the right repair as opposed to the obvious one."

GI4Housing maps out a new community

A group of housing professionals with an interest in all things GIS-related have created a community to offer support and share ideas and best practice.

GI4Housing aims to bring together the individuals in housing who are doing excellent things with GIS through a series of bi-annual meetings. The group is aimed at people who currently use GIS in housing but is also open to housing providers who want to establish an in house GIS solution and want to learn more.

The most recent meeting was held at Midland Heart and featured speakers from Ordnance Survey, Land Registry and Ambiental Technical Solutions talking about the types of data they can provide. Representatives from Aster Group, Bracknell Forest Homes and Midland Heart also presented case studies on how they were each using GIS.

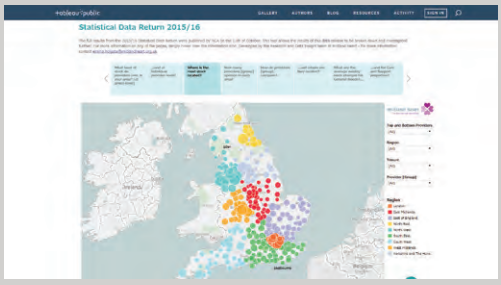
Emma Holgate, research and data insight analyst, Midland Heart, said, "We are using GIS as a tool to view and map our properties and we also perform some really interesting spatial analysis using the software. As someone who is fairly new to GIS and housing, it's great to be a part of a group which gives me the opportunity to learn a lot from others in the sector."

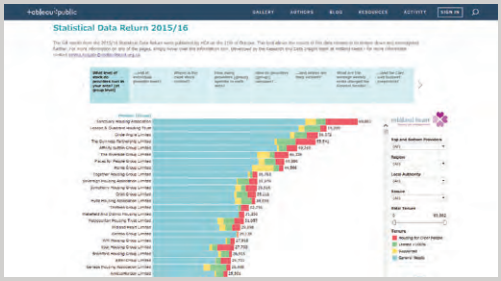
From L-R: Paul Drury (Ambiental Technical Solutions), Tony Jardine (Ordnance Survey), Luke Angwin (Aster Group), Alex Hill (Plus Dane) & Emma Holgate (Midland Heart)

Alex Hill, GIS manager, Plus Dane Group, said, "We are seeing more and more housing providers becoming aware of the benefits of GIS and they are turning to GI4Housing as an impartial source of knowledge and advice. Even organisations that have had GIS for several years are joining to network with their peers, and learn about the many new ways GI is being successfully used."

FREE HCA DATA VISUALISATION FROM MIDLAND HEART

Helen Kelly, policy specialist at Midland Heart using the SDR tool





Midland Heart has developed a free visualisation tool to enable any housing provider to make much better use of the Homes and Communities Agency's annual release of data on every housing provider's stock holdings in England.

James Jervis, research and data insight manager, Midland Heart said, "We developed this tool to help housing providers better understand and use the data from the HCA. We received some great feedback last year and so, following the HCA's recent 2015/16 release of the data, we have refreshed the tool."

The 2015/16 data allows housing providers to easily determine their position in the sector. For example, while Midland Heart is the dominant provider in Birmingham, the visualisation tool can show how crowded the social housing sector is in this area; of all the local authorities in England, Birmingham has the highest number of individual providers with 70 organisations.

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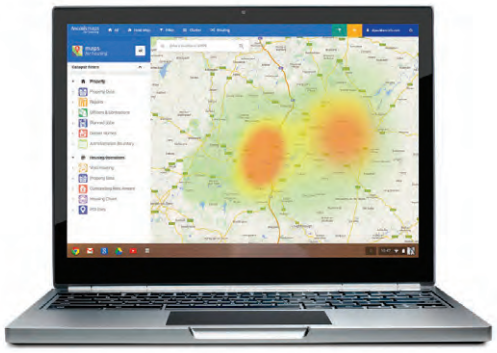
ANCORIS MAPS FOR HOUSING AT SALIX HOMES

Salix Homes has completed its implementation of Ancoris Maps for Housing. The implementation, which follows a wider IT transformation programme, will enable the housing provider to use geographic data for better informed business decisions and improved operational efficiency.

Ancoris Maps for Housing is an online mapping and visualisation application that gives users access to live data such as property types, voids, rent arrears and neighbourhood patches, all overlaid on a familiar Google Maps visual.

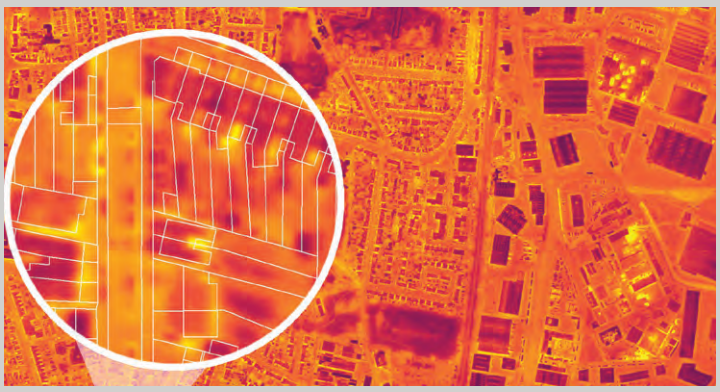
Sian Grant, director for customer services, Salix Homes, said, "Ancoris Maps for Housing fitted perfectly with our vision of a more responsive and agile organisation. The application was up and running in less than six weeks and the early indications are very positive."



Accessible from any device, the online application combines operational data with location elements. Data can be filtered and analysed to identify trends and patterns, such as reducing rent arrears by visualising information to plan and take preventative action and providing data to better allocate properties by matching tenant needs to local areas.

Bluesky spots Enfield 'beds in sheds'

Enfield Council is using aerial maps from Bluesky to identify outbuildings used illegally for residential purposes. The problem of 'beds in sheds' is growing, with nearly 40,000 inspections across the UK resulting in over 3,000 landlords facing further enforcement action or prosecution since 2011.



Earlier this year, the Department for Communities and Local Government announced a £5 million boost for councils to tackle rogue landlords, with Enfield Council receiving £360,000 of funding.

Enfield used part of this funding to commission Bluesky to fly the streets of Enfield with a special thermal camera that can capture heat loss values for individual buildings across the entire borough in just one evening. The resulting thermal maps, when combined with aerial photographs, are helping Enfield Council to identify properties with unusual or unexpected heat signatures that may be being used for living accommodation or other unpermitted purposes.

Rob Oles, pollution control and planning enforcement manager, Enfield Council, said, "The thermal imagery, when overlaid with the photography, allows us to identify and target specific areas in the borough where we know there is potentially a problem with rogue landlords."

RIVERLITE GAINS PREMIER CISCO CERTIFICATION

Riverlite has been awarded Premier Partner status from Cisco, reflecting the IT managed services company's new depth of skills in Cisco technologies. Riverlite's customers include TunTum Housing and Action Housing.

Premier Partner status is given to those organisations that meet set Cisco criteria. To achieve the new higher standard, Riverlite demonstrated its strong sales, technical and service capabilities for integrated, highly secure networking solutions and showcased increased technical competency within the company.

Paul Oggelsby, managing director, Riverlite, said, "Our partnership with Cisco gives our customers access to the world's leading network manufacturer, with the delivery of its latest innovative products direct from Riverlite. Our relationship with Cisco is very important to us and we are proud to have been recognised with this new accolade, demonstrating our commitment to Cisco and to continued professional development."

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HOW SECURE ARE YOUR CCTV SYSTEMS?

James Wickes, CEO & Co-founder, Cloudview

Housing providers rely on CCTV to protect their residents and properties. So many property managers will be worried after reading in the national press last month that MI6 is concerned that some CCTV cameras pose a potential threat to national security.

The article highlighted that China is Britain's largest supplier of CCTV equipment and expressed grave concerns about the potential security risk, particularly for internet-connected cameras. As a result, the CCTV section of the British Security Industry Association (BSIA) urged operators of IP-connected surveillance systems to do more to safeguard their systems against cyber attacks.

This story reminds us that many CCTV systems are inherently insecure. Independent research (see link at the end of this article) published earlier this year found that several CCTV systems connected to the internet were successfully controlled by an unknown attacker in just 24 hours and had worrying security flaws, providing an open door to the rest of an organisation's network. It found that both analogue and digital systems are at risk, as are many cloud-based systems.

While the information held by housing providers may not in itself threaten national security, insecure CCTV cameras pose other risks. They are a potential entry point for corruption and Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, and make organisations vulnerable to the extraction of sensitive information, breaching the Data Protection Act (DPA). However, the good news is that many of these risks can be prevented by understanding how they arise and taking simple security precautions.

A key vulnerability in traditional DVR-based systems is their use of port forwarding, which effectively creates a 'hole' in the firewall, thus compromising the security of the network. The firewall can be configured to only allow certain

external IPs (known as IP white-listing), but companies still remain vulnerable to attack.

Many manufacturers recommend using Dynamic DNS, which automatically updates a name server in the Domain Name Server (DNS) to enable the user to find the DVR. The problem is that this allows a potential attacker to find hundreds or even thousands of vulnerable devices simply by testing domain names. Other problems include a lack of updates to fix bugs identified post-sale and the propensity of manufacturers to include 'back doors' which are often revealed on the internet.

Users themselves may exacerbate problems because footage may rarely be looked at and the user interface provides no feedback, so problems may not be discovered until long after a security breach.

Dedicated cloud based solutions are designed to provide built-in internet connectivity, rather than having it 'bolted on', and offer features such as remote video streaming and data back-up in a more reliable and user-friendly way. In principle, they should offer improved security, but can suffer from similar vulnerabilities to DVRs. However, many cloud video solutions also use port forwarding to allow access to RTSP video streams, making them just as vulnerable as DVR-based systems.

The other potential risk with cloud-based solutions is data security. Users need to ensure that their cloud providers have strictly defined controls around the access to, and management of, customer data, and do not share that data with a third party without their explicit consent. To ensure sensitive data is secured both in transit to and while stored in the cloud, organisations need to look for systems that offer authentication, end-to-end encryption with SHA-2 and TLS, and a digital signature to ensure data integrity. They also need to find out where the data is held to ensure they are compliant with data protection regulations.

Intelligent IoT camera adapters are now available which only allow encrypted outbound connections to specific cloud-based services, and can be retrofitted to existing analogue and digital cameras. They connect both types of cameras securely to the cloud using standard internet connections – broadband, 3G or satellite. Authorised users can then access the footage from any device and any location. Because such adapters only require a fraction of the functionality of a full DVR, they are much less useful to a potential attacker.

While these offer a more secure solution to CCTV security, there are two simple steps that organisations can take immediately, whatever system they have installed. First, they should ensure that usernames and passwords have been changed from the default state and are of a sufficient strength to prevent immediate access.

Secondly, they should ensure that they comply with the recommendations of the Information Commissioner's Office and the Surveillance Camera Commissioner by ensuring that all CCTV data is encrypted when in transit and when it is being stored to prevent it from being used for unauthorised purposes.

James Wickes is CEO and co-founder of Cloudview.

To download a copy of the independent research, visit http://bit.do/cyber_attack. For more information visit www.cloudview.co.

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FROM IRON MAN TO SOCIAL HOUSING – THE HOW, WHY AND REALITY OF IOT

Chris Deery, Head of Housing IT, Solihull Community Housing

Chris Deery, head of housing IT at Solihull Community Housing, and Stewart Davison, head of business development for Capita's software services, consider how the internet of things will change social housing over the next few years.

The why - Looking at IoT's benefits and its business case

When I think about smart homes, the first thing that pops into my head is Tony Stark's impressive mansion in the Iron Man films. As well as having all of the smart home basics, such as automated lighting and temperature control, voice control and automatic doors, the entire system is all tied wirelessly back into Stark's artificial-intelligence supercomputer, Jarvis. The technology behind this linking together of devices, the internet of things (IoT), is believed by many to be only about 18 months away from being commonplace. But are smart homes only a play thing for the rich or is the technology becoming affordable for the field of social housing? Is this science fiction or is it about to become science fact?

We've all probably seen the British Gas adverts for their Hive product that allows customers to control their heating from a smartphone, and there are smoke detectors on the market that are another good example of what makes the internet of things exciting. It's a normal product that you'd barely ever think about, which just gets smarter when you put a chip in it. It isn't a spectacular product but it's a very dependable one, and installing one in your house will make you feel ever so slightly more at ease. For example, pairing the smoke detector up with a thermostat and/or boiler will mean that your boiler can be automatically shut off in case of a fire.

I'm sure that some tenants would love a smart house with automatic lights and thermostats they could control from their smartphones. But in reality, is there a sound business case that would allow housing providers to consider installing smart technology in a social housing context?

I would like to take a couple of examples of how this technology might be used and explore how it could generate savings for housing providers. It is worth noting that the initial cost of smart technology and IoT devices is unlikely to have an immediate or short-term return on investment; business cases should probably be evaluated over a 10-year period, but if you take a longer-term view of the proposals, it's possible to see substantial savings and improvements in the quality of services provided to tenants.

Let's take gas safety work. At the moment, everyone in the housing sector needs to have a gas safety certificate for every property with a gas supply. In our case, Solihull Community Housing has around 10,000 properties but not all have a gas supply so that represents about 8,000 gas certificates. Like most housing providers, we don't wait until the twelfth month to send out an engineer to carry out a safety check, so we generate a new gas safety job for each property about once every 10 months. We spend about £25,000 a year on this process alone. In some rare cases, the tenant cannot or will not allow us access to their property so we also have a dozen or so cases every year where we spend about £700 each on legal costs to gain access to the tenant's home.

Now imagine a situation where we could get a gas safety certificate without ever needing to visit a tenant's home. Sensors can be installed in a property to detect even the smallest amount of carbon monoxide or methane. Worcester Bosch smart boilers can diagnose early signs of faults and breakdowns and send information to warn the landlord of a problem long before the tenant knows there is a problem. This would mean that rather than testing the safety of a gas installation every 10 months or so, we could test its safety every hour. You might say that, as well as doing the safety checks, we also need to service the boiler and so someone still needs to visit the property, but there is evidence to suggest that the time when a boiler is most likely to break down is actually just after it's been serviced. This suggests that servicing a boiler, rather than reducing the likelihood that it will break down, actually increases the chances of a failure.

There are lots of situations like gas servicing in social housing, where we send out an operative in a van, that could be reduced if we had smart humidity sensors in our properties. This could include reducing damp and mould problems, which, in our case, costs around £150,000 a year in monitoring and repairs.

Another non-repairs related example is noise-nuisance ASB cases, of which we have around 300 each year. Each case can take between two days and three weeks to investigate. It can be very distressing for the victim and very expensive for us. Imagine if every

FROM IRON MAN TO SOCIAL HOUSING – THE HOW, WHY AND REALITY OF IOT

Continued from previous page

property had a sensor that could measure the level of noise within it. When a tenant living in a block of flats calls to complain that his neighbour was playing loud music late at night, the contact centre could access the sonic data and see not only the noise level but also exactly when the music started and when it ended. In addition, you would know not only the noise level in the property of the person playing the music but also the noise that could be heard in the flats on either side, above and below. An ASB case could be dealt with in minutes, even when the complainant wasn't entirely sure where the noise was coming from. In Solihull, we could save up to £36,000 per year if we had these sorts of sensors in our properties.

It seems to me that the key question at this point is, can we purchase smart sensors that can detect noise levels, carbon monoxide, dust, humidity, methane and vibrations at an affordable price? Stewart Davison from Capita has been looking at this question.

The how: the technology behind IoT and making it a reality

Stewart Davison, Head of Business Development, Capita Software Services

The technology surrounding IoT can be confusing. Do you look at devices with open standards or do you choose a more 'closed loop' environment to mitigate any security issues. What do you want to focus on - the property, with smarter asset management, the person, with sheltered and extra care, or a blend of both? How then to find an IoT solution with the technology that 'fits' with the reality of social housing?

As a software supplier, you would expect Capita to focus more on how the data produced by IoT sensors could be used within systems such as housing, asset and contractor management, and we have been doing exactly that, looking at the operational processes Chris mentioned earlier.

Initially though, our focus was on the hardware and physical infrastructure associated with a stable and effective IoT offering and how they could be delivered as a commercial package. Some of the areas we looked at included the ease of deploying sensor packages, the security of data transmissions and wi-fi vs. GSM, what sensors to include in the package, and how to create a cost effective solution for an emerging technology that has the capability to grow.

We have spent the past two years looking at these areas in conjunction with Solihull Community Housing running a proof-of-concept to test IoT in a live housing environment.

Any IoT solution needing to be deployed across potentially tens of thousands of properties must be easy to install. It needs to have the capability of being installed either in a fixed-wire capacity or in a more portable way, using a property's power supply or an internal battery, and it shouldn't need any specialist skills, instead being installed by a standard electrician.

Security and IoT go hand in hand, so while we have started on fairly innocuous applications of sensors, focusing on the property sensors, we needed to consider future additions, such as energy and utilities consumption. The solution we used had a three-tiered approach to security with the individual sensor sending its data in an encrypted format. This encryption is then used at each step of the transmission process, severely limiting the opportunity to intercept the data and use it maliciously.

Fixed broadband in social housing is still far behind the average in the UK and may even drop as the ubiquitous nature of smartphones and mobile broadband speeds increase in popularity. Therefore any IoT solution that requires either fixed broadband or wi-fi installation could be limited in its ability to be effectively deployed. As a result, the solution we chose uses GSM, which has near universal coverage across the UK.

Focusing on applying IoT specifically to properties, and always with simplicity in mind, led us to select a 5-in-1 sensor device that included temperature, humidity, acoustics, smoke and carbon monoxide detection. The device can report tampering, faults, receive software updates and even carry out some self-diagnosis and fault fixing. The housing itself is innocuous, looking no different from typical smoke and carbon monoxide detection units.

This package enabled a successful proof of concept to be established, which in turn is allowing us to carry out more research to establish return on investment information for housing providers considering IoT programmes.

The costs involved are realistic and the work being done by organisations such as Two Castles Housing and Solihull Community Housing is enabling clearer RoIs and demonstrating that IoT has a real place in social housing.

And if it's good enough for Iron Man, it's good enough for us.

Chris Deery is head of housing IT at Solihull Community Housing, and Stewart Davison is head of business development for Capita's software services.

ALLIANCE HOMES' STORAGE SOLUTION FROM CRISTIE DATA

Cristie Data, a data storage, backup and virtualisation solutions provider and part of the Iomart Group, has completed the implementation of a data storage solution at Alliance Homes.

Alliance Homes asked Cristie Data to recommend a replacement for its previous storage area network (SAN) and a Nimble Storage CS300 array was chosen to support Alliance Homes' heavily virtualised environment. The hybrid solution has also allowed the housing provider to try SSD (solid-state drive) storage without the expense of a pure SSD SAN. The cache hit-rate from SSD is currently running around a minimum of 97 per cent, a marked improvement for Alliance Homes.

Philip Hill, IT systems analyst, Alliance Homes, said, "I am really pleased with the SAN. The Nimble storage array is brilliant and takes up less space in the racks. If it came down to it and I had to buy another, I would certainly favour Nimble; it just sits there in the rack, doing its thing and getting on with it.

"More than anything, I liked Cristie Data. I found them to be easy-going and not at all pushy. I thought that these are people I could really work with, and when you're making an investment that will last 3-5 years, you have to be confident in that relationship."

A DRONE'S VIEW OF THE INTERNET OF THINGS

Caroline Morgan, IT Director, Seedcorn Consulting

With the luxury of time away from the 'day job', I went to this year's SmartSummit in London to see what I could learn about the internet of things (IoT). There's much talk of conventional organisations being 'Uber-ised' by small disruptor companies, changing the way entire industries operate, and the IoT is potentially part of that disruption.

There were three separate conference strands at SmartSummit 2016 – Home, Cities and Industry, but which to attend? I checked the attendee list but I couldn't spot anyone else from social housing. The Smart Homes' speakers were as I expected, lots of retailers such as Amazon, Ikea, John Lewis, and Tesco, and manufacturers such as Electrolux, Honeywell and Panasonic covering the headline topics of security, health, and entertainment. I've seen presentations on the potential benefits of IoT and wanted to focus on something new, so looked at Smart Cities. Their speakers fell into two camps: city councils (Bristol to Newcastle, Marseille to Moscow) and engineers, consultants and academics (Arup, Crossrail, Siemens, Open University, etc) but I thought there was limited scope for an individual housing provider to drive the agenda. The Industrial Internet, on the other hand – what was that going to come up with? It looked like the richest ground for completely new ideas, so I headed that way.

The Industrial Internet's speakers mostly related to 'big equipment', such as the airline sector (Airbus, Rolls Royce, Heathrow Airport, Lufthansa), and 'yellow machines' (Amey, Hitachi, Kone) as well as a biotech company, several utilities, a couple of universities and, closer to home, RICS.

The most engaging sessions were the case studies. I'd guessed these would build on the process control world, in place in manufacturing for years; that proved right. The big changes which IoT devices and connectivity have brought are:

- Process controls used to be installed in factories, where machines were monitored from purpose-built control rooms. Now, with so much equipment having technology installed to support basic operations, and monitors connected wirelessly, equipment in the field can be analysed and potentially controlled in a similar way. Kone reported that they've not only used this to maintain their own cranes on

A DRONE'S VIEW OF THE INTERNET OF THINGS

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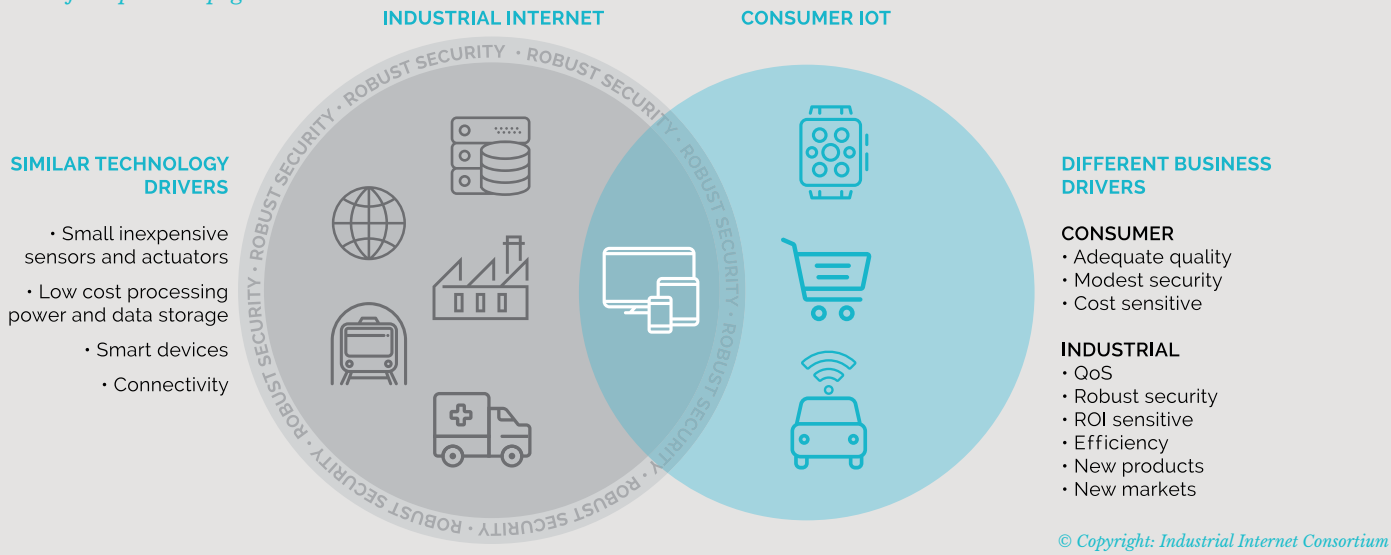

customers' sites, collecting lifetime costs and checking whether the cranes have been used correctly but they can also offer support for competitors' equipment. The information Kone have collected has allowed them to change their entire business model; they now see themselves as primarily providing a lifting service, rather than selling lifting equipment.

- 'Smart' devices are so ubiquitous and cheap that IoT can be applied in unconventional environments. In the consumer market, this applies to everything from wearables to USB-charged bike lights. In industry, there are more specialised devices: sensors for farming, chips on boxes, which don't need to be installed in permanent equipment. Cheap, biodegradable sensors can be thrown out into fields to collect data on humidity, nutrition, response to chemicals and crop growth, and by providing data from numerous points in a field, they can help fine-tune the application of water, seeds, fertilisers, etc. And an individual box can now report back on the temperature, humidity, impacts it's been through, and its current location.

Alongside the case studies, there were several presentations on standards. Leaders in the IoT field have realised that separate worlds are converging – Operational Technology (OT) and IT. If standards for collecting and sharing data aren't set up, it'll make it much harder to reap the benefits. There's an initiative on standards for SIMs (now being installed not just in phones and tablets, but in cars, smart meters, diabetes monitoring kits and so on). And also a move on interfaces, led by equipment manufacturers such as Siemens, working with SAP and Microsoft.

Not surprisingly, the standards presentations were pretty dry, but they gave a useful overview of the areas where solutions are being developed. These included ageing, farming and food, wearables, cities, mobility, water management, manufacturing, energy, and buildings and architecture.

As one speaker explained, there isn't a single IoT industry; there are a multitude of opportunities, in individual industries. Perhaps the multitude of opportunities within social housing, as our sector itself is diverse, is our key challenge?

The panel discussions touched on this, and other blockers to adoption. Innovation needs joint inputs from areas such as IT, marketing, procurement, finance and manufacturing. IoT initiatives face the same challenge as the move to Digital; in some organisations IT leads the innovation agenda, but in others, it's more dissipated.

If you can resolve the ownership problem, these are some of the practical barriers:

- Connectivity – Remote sites, thick walls, deep basements and so on.
- Latency – For industrial controls (e.g. machine tools), sub-second responses can be crucial but perhaps that's less of an issue in housing.
- Security – Historically, operational devices haven't been connected and haven't had anti-virus software because of the risks of interrupting them with automatic software updates, but hackers using this weakness to launch attacks is now a reality. Conventional IT teams, as found in housing providers, are much more clued up about privacy and security issues than OT providers, for whom virus and data protection issues are new.
- Legacy – Getting devices up to new standards will take time where there's already an installed base. For organisations such as hospitals, with an array of existing equipment, replacement will happen gradually.
- Data volumes and skills – Real-time transmission of a constant stream of readings from IoT devices generates huge volumes of data. The challenge is to do something useful with all this data. Speakers talked of an 'arms race for talent' already happening. This was where the speaker from the RICS came in: their director of professional groups is so convinced of this that he's planning to combine data science into surveyors' professional training.

So the key things I would pass on to Housing Technology readers are:

- Nothing I saw came as a great surprise, but it was a timely reminder that we have to be ready to innovate.
- At the moment, the IoT feels like a set of solutions looking for problems; like AI did, for many years.
- Data is set to take off, both in volume and as an analytical tool, so be ready with an infrastructure which can expand and the skills to work out what it all means. Getting existing data clean is an essential start.
- Even in unexpected industries, IoT can be a disrupter. Who would have thought that the IoT would revolutionise a crane manufacturer, so watch this space.

Caroline Morgan is an IT director at Seedcorn Consulting.

THERE'S AN IOT FOR HUE TADO

Aidan Dunphy, Head of Product Strategy, Orchard Information Systems

The internet of things (IoT) is broadly seen as the next evolution of the internet, the integration of connected computing into people's everyday environments. This presents enormous opportunities for computing to transform our lives in ways that can be hard to imagine. Global consumer technology providers are racing to commercialise IoT concepts and to establish themselves as the default platform of choice. This means that we should expect IoT to become a familiar part of customers' lives, and that they will expect all of their service providers to leverage the benefits it offers. As owners of large property portfolios, and with a unique customer relationship, the application of IoT to homes is particularly significant to housing providers.

So what does IoT mean to the housing sector in late 2016? At the highest level, it's an architecture of devices, networks and data. The initial hype concerning fridges that tell you when you need to buy more milk, or colour-changing light bulbs that you control using your smartphone has given rise to some scepticism, and it's certainly true that many of the first round of geek-appeal applications will probably fail to gain broader traction in society.

You can now buy a physical switch to control your Hue light bulb without having to use your pesky smartphone. However, avoiding having your heating break down because your boiler warned your supplier that its outlet pipe was about to freeze up is a huge benefit for all parties. The public imagination is dominated by these individual-scale applications which can be packaged as consumer products.

When employed at scale, IoT offers insights that simply haven't been possible before. Much has been made of the need to create platforms which can handle the truly 'big data' that is predicted to be generated by the millions of devices forecast to arrive in homes over the next decade. Analytical techniques can be used to discover trends, associations and support targeted enquiries which could be extremely powerful for large-scale and long-term planning.

Perhaps the most obvious opportunity for cashable benefits is in repairs and maintenance, and certainly the most significant area of spending for any housing provider. By analysing the characteristics of property types and the likely behaviour of the occupants, replacement and other major works programmes can be tailored to deliver significant savings.

Data gathered from installed sensors measuring heat, moisture and detecting movement and usage in the home can be used to significantly improve the cost-efficiency of responsive repairs, and especially long-term maintenance. Replacement programmes can be adjusted to take account of usage (or otherwise), and costly responsive repairs services can be tailored to take account of occupant behaviour. For example, if moisture in a property can be correlated with temperature, then perhaps it's not rising damp that's causing the problem but wet clothes being dried on radiators.

Despite the seemingly 'no brainer' potential of IoT, it's been slow to take off in the sector and proven use cases are thin on the ground. One of the key barriers has been the lack of standards, or rather too many of them; at last count there were five standards bodies, and countless manufacturers trying to get a piece of the action. The recent demise of 365Agile's last operation, 'wireless things' highlights the problem; it was an interesting approach, built on innovative technology, but its 'closed garden' approach presented a barrier to integration with existing information and process systems. The same problem is reflected on the systems side, with many of the traditional housing software suppliers still refusing to offer the open architecture that could make their platforms 'IoT ready', instead choosing to try to lock their customers into a proprietary ecosystem.

Nevertheless, any forward-looking house builder would be wise to wire up their new builds in readiness for IoT; it's a genie that won't be put back in the bottle. As the cost of the technology continues to fall and pilot projects start to prove use cases, retro-fitting IoT into existing stock will first become economically viable, and then a normal activity.

Tenants will come to expect the benefits of connected devices, and data will be collected; it's up to housing providers and their suppliers to ensure they are well-placed to respond in an environment of rapidly-rising customer expectations and an increasingly competitive housing market.

Aidan Dunphy is the head of product strategy at Orchard Information Systems.

UNLOCKING THE VALUE OF IOT DATA

Ian Napier, Co-founder, Switchee

At its core, the internet of things (IoT) is the layering of connectivity onto everyday objects. As advancements in microchip technology continue to drive down the size and cost of connective chips, it has become increasingly viable to add small sensors to a growing number of everyday 'things'.

The trend is accelerating and has already given rise to much speculation over the potential of the IoT to reshape user experiences and business models across a range of markets, from the connected home and energy management, through to wearable technology, virtual reality, automobiles and biometrics.

The range of applications for IoT within social housing is vast. Being able to collect sensor data from devices imbedded with smart functionality - and even remotely control an increasing variety of objects - gives housing providers the ability to influence and understand aspects of asset performance and resident well-being that could never have been contemplated a decade ago.

Moreover, the targeted analysis of data generated by connected ecosystems can allow insight into and improvements of business processes. This data-driven insight will allow IT, asset management, housing management and sustainability teams to improve the efficiency of service delivery while leveraging new IoT technologies to reduce cost – a win-win situation for housing providers and residents alike.

Connecting things

At a simple level of application, connected sensors can be used to relay remote environmental information. Temperature, humidity, light, air pressure and carbon dioxide readings can shine previously unavailable light into asset registers and stock surveys, providing managers with dynamic indicators of property conditions. Sensors can also be configured to capture data in shared and outside spaces; for example, sound levels in communal areas or external air quality and lighting levels.

Elements of property usage can also be connected. Energy usage data is already recorded by smart meters and can also be accessed via the retrofit of gas and electricity consumption monitors into properties with old meters. Leak detection sensors have already seen an uptake in a number of commercial settings and can provide remote alerts and early detection in homes.

To date, higher value items such as boilers, fridges and cars have tended to be connected to the IoT. Being able to monitor boiler performance clearly plays a significant role in social housing. Over time, the drive to connectivity will open up the IoT to increasingly everyday items – in fact, a world in which toasters, kettles and light bulbs can be connected is already a reality. With more devices able to send live, remote data, the sheer amount of information available to asset managers will be unprecedented.

Purpose-built smart devices leverage connectivity and automation to give added functionality. Smart thermostats can automatically regulate heating levels to optimise energy consumption, help reduce fuel bills and combat fuel poverty. Smart locks can be used to remotely lock and unlock properties, and, with the right permissions, used by landlords to secure and control access to offices and places of work.

As 'smart' becomes a prefix in more technologies, new devices can optimise everyday functions and even allow residents to remotely control devices in their homes and manage their lives in more efficient ways.

Understanding and leveraging data

Whatever the physical shape of an IoT estate, the key to unlocking its value is in understanding and correctly leveraging the data. Sensor data can be used to monitor household conditions and identify properties at risk of fuel poverty or living conditions which fall below Decent Homes standards.

With early identification, housing and asset managers can work proactively with struggling tenants to provide budgeting advice, head off later, costlier repairs or even prevent someone becoming unwell as a result of their environment.

Real-time and historical data analytics can support different approaches to maintenance. For example, remote temperature and humidity data can now be analysed to identify properties at risk of condensation and mould growth. With this information, landlords can act proactively to prevent damp worsening and combat mould in affected properties. Tackling problems before they escalate is more cost effective, allows for better planning and creates better outcomes for tenants.

Data can allow for a greater understanding of the causes of maintenance issues. Humidity readings, for example, can be analysed to determine whether condensation is due to ventilation or a behaviour in the property. Such insight can help triage responses; knowing if an extractor fan is broken or simply giving advice to residents on ventilation can save unnecessary visits and direct resources better.

Similarly, by being able to remotely diagnose faulty equipment in the home, such as boilers, landlords can take a proactive approach to repairs. By feeding data into building management systems, automatic alerts can be used to trigger repairs, reducing friction and cost by automatically booking.

Continued on next page

UNLOCKING THE VALUE OF IOT DATA

Continued from previous page

Connectivity can be taken even further: the remote testing of boilers before the heating season can identify necessary repairs ahead of winter, allowing repairs to be scheduled together at convenient times, avoiding surge demand when the weather cools.

Longer-term planning and investment decisions can also benefit from analysis of IoT data. Monitoring buildings' thermal performance can help prioritise properties for retrofitting and provide before and after data on how effective certain upgrades have been.

The future

Early adopters of IoT services are already showcasing its benefits in relation to smarter asset management and enhancing outcomes for residents. Schemes such as Bristol Council's switch to smart metering are already demonstrating the benefits of smart technology and encouraging different housing providers to follow suit.

By working in partnership with developers of IoT technology, housing providers and local authorities will be able to stay abreast of innovation and shape new asset management solutions.

The possibilities are endless and will ultimately extend beyond the benefits to tenants and in improving repairs and asset management. Energy consumption and occupancy data may one day become a part of building planning, with data insights leveraged to optimise floor plans and energy efficiency. What's more, the possibilities for helping more vulnerable residents are only starting to be explored with simple temperature or occupancy alerts, and wearable technology providing an additional level of care, for example.

As more data will enable a greater understanding of the links between housing, health and well-being, so may IoT technologies start to offer new models of healthcare support.

Ian Napier is the co-founder of Switchee.

Switchee wins £600,000 funding for IoT housing project

Switchee, a 'clean-tech' start-up which has developed the first smart thermostat for large social housing providers, has raised over £600,000 in seed funding.

The company said that the funding will be used to expand the reach of its smart thermostat technology, which saves tenants money by detecting occupancy and turning heating off when a property is empty, and provides aggregated, remote data analytics for housing providers, allowing them to better manage large property portfolios, reduce service delivery costs and enhance tenants' well-being.

Adam Fudakowski, managing director, Switchee, said, "The feedback from our pilot projects with housing providers has been extremely encouraging,

Ian Napier (l) & Adam Fudakowski (r) of Switchee

from landlords and residents alike. We are focused on a significant summer installation programme into 11 housing associations."

Combining temperature, motion, humidity, pressure and light sensors, with a learning algorithm and analytics, Switchee matches energy usage to residents' weekly routines. The data that drives Switchee's heating profiles can provide insight for landlord's asset management teams.

The investment round, which exceeded its £550,000 target, was led by Mustard Seed Ventures and ClearlySo. The round was also supported by Wayra UK, part of Telefonica Open Future, and the property technology VC fund Pi Labs.

GENERAL NEWS

NETWORK HOMES GETS LEGAL WITH ECLIPSE

Eclipse Legal Systems is implementing its Law Society-endorsed Proclaim case management software for Network Homes' newly-formed in-house legal team.

The Proclaim software is expected to streamline and automate routine processes, reduce spending on external legal fees and centralise all the legal team's key information into a single desktop application.

Tabitha Kassem, head of legal services, Network Homes, said, "Our in-house legal team needs to be as efficient as possible. With Proclaim, manual document production will be eliminated, ensuring fast processing and the removal of human error. Additionally, thanks to Eclipse and Proclaim's inherent scalability, we can continue to develop our property portfolio."

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HOUSING™ TECHNOLOGY 2017 | CONFERENCE AND EXECUTIVE FORUM

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2017

Our ninth annual Housing Technology conference and executive forum is taking place on 7-9 March 2017 once again at The Oxford Belfry.

The Housing Technology 2017 conference offers the very best business and IT networking in our sector and for you to connect, collaborate and contribute.

Our annual conference always brings together masses of senior IT and business people from all sizes of housing providers and always delivers an eclectic mixture of presentations and discussions over the two days of the event alongside a technology showcase in the exhibition area.

BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY FOCUS

HOUSING TECHNOLOGY 2017 WILL FOCUS ON:

- IT STRATEGIES FOR BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION, VALUE FOR MONEY AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES
- CORE BUSINESS APPLICATIONS, INCL. HOUSING, FINANCE AND ASSET MANAGEMENT
- EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, INCL. THE INTERNET OF THINGS, BIG DATA, SOCIAL MEDIA, GIS AND CONNECTED HOMES
- OMNI-CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS WITH TENANTS, CONTRACTORS AND SUPPLIERS
- UNIVERSAL CREDIT, RENT REDUCTIONS, PAY TO STAY, AND OTHER FINANCIAL/REGULATORY AREAS
- MOBILE WORKING AND DYNAMIC SCHEDULING
- IT INFRASTRUCTURE, INCL. SOFTWARE LICENSING, CLOUD, SAAS AND SECURITY

TECHNOLOGY SHOWCASE

At the time of going to press, 1st Touch, Aareon, Footprint Solutions, MIS-AMS, Mobysoft, Orchard, and Sovereign Business Integration Group had already confirmed their presence in Housing Technology 2017's main technology showcase area at the heart of the event. Further sponsors and exhibitors will be confirmed in December.

BOOK YOUR PLACE NOW!

Registration for Housing Technology is now open at **www.housing-technology.com/events/ht17** so please visit the site for more information and to reserve your place.

EVENING EVENTS

As part of the overall conference, Housing Technology 2017 will also have three subsidiary evening events, to which all delegates, speakers, sponsors and exhibitors are invited.

- **PRE-EVENT DRINKS RECEPTION (Tuesday 7th March)**
- **DRINKS RECEPTION (Wednesday 8th March)**
- **INFORMAL SUPPER (Wednesday 8th March)**

KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

WEDNESDAY 8 MARCH 2017 BENNETT ARRON

When Bennett Arron had his identity stolen, the consequences were devastating. He spent two years trying to clear his name during which time he became penniless and homeless and had to live with family and friends.

Years later, Bennett wrote a comedy show about his experience. He perfomed the show 'It wasn't me, it was Bennett Arron' at the Edinburgh Festival. As a result of the show, Bennett was asked by Channel 4 to direct and present a documentary on fraud and identity theft.

In the documentary, 'How to steal an identity', Bennett proved through a series of stunts how easy the crime of ID theft is to carry out. He first stole the identities of the general public and then went on to steal the identity of the Home Secretary. This action resulted in Bennett being arrested in a dawn raid by Scotland Yard under the codename Operation Hydrogen.

Bennett now tours around the world, telling his disturbingly true yet funny account of what it's like to have your identity stolen and revealing the devastating consequences of making a documentary 'in the public interest'.

Bennett has been called 'A Welsh Seinfeld' by The Guardian, 'Genuinely original and funny' by The Times and 'Case Number 2477419' by The Metropolitan Police.

THURSDAY 9 MARCH 2017 ALEXIS CONRAN

Alexis Conran, TV presenter and LAMDA-trained actor, is best known known as the man who identifies, uncovers and helps us to protect our businesses and ourselves against scams. As writer and presenter of the highly-acclaimed BBC TV show 'The Real Hustle', he is in the rare position of being able to advise and educate, even the most foolhardy, on issues surrounding security and risk (in the real and virtual worlds), and identify the human behaviour, communication skills and confidence tricks that the world's top scammers rely on to achieve their unscrupulous aims.

Alexis employs his knowledge of the dark and deceptive world of hustling, pickpockets and con-artists to speak candidly on the risks and security threats constantly faced by businesses, and to deliver important messages on the shrewdest ways to protect against the ever increasing number of scams. His recent clients include IBM, the RSA Security Conference, Experian, RBS, Halifax, Aviva, Facebook, Porsche, VISA, The Metropolitan Police and the City of London Police Fraud in Action Unit.

ALEXIS'S TOPICS WILL INCLUDE:

- The psychology of deception - how the brain can be fooled by assumption.
- The anatomy of a scam - how a handful of scams that have existed for 1000s of years still catch people out.
- The necessary credentials to become the best salesman in your team/the world.
- Why systems fail - The human face of security.
- Trust and transparency - How to stay safe in an uncertain world.
- The illusion(s) of trust and the secrets behind it.

WIDEST CHOICE OF PRESENTATIONS & TOPICS

- **AAREON:** Why you can't afford to ignore channel shift
- **ACCENT GROUP:** Connecting it all together
- **AMICUSHORIZON:** How infrastructure decisions are influenced by corporate objectives
- **BLACKWOOD GROUP:** CleverCogs for more independent tenants
- **BOURNEMOUTH BOROUGH COUNCIL:** Mobile working, dynamic scheduling and new commercial approaches
- **CHG:** Responding to cyber security incidents
- **CHS GROUP:** Low-cost wireless connectivity
- **CIRCLE:** A potted history of Circle's CRM
- **FAMILY MOSAIC:** User experiences – from system-centric design to user-focused delivery
- **FIRST WESSEX:** Rental cuts vs. cloud, mobile & digital transformation
- **ISLINGTON & SHOREDITCH HOUSING:** Microsoft Power BI in housing
- **ISOS HOUSING:** Implementing a common HMS
- **ORBIT GROUP:** Bespoke mapping with GIS
- **SANCTUARY GROUP:** Deploying ERP software
- **SEVERNSIDE HOUSING:** IoT in social housing
- **SOHA HOUSING:** Voice analytics in housing CRM
- **SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING:** The IT and business implications of pay-to-stay
- **SOVEREIGN HOUSING:** The benefits of an enterprise GIS
- **TORUS:** IT strategies for business transformation, VFM and operational efficiencies
- **UNITE SOLUTIONS (SHROPSHIRE HOUSING GROUP & SEVERNSIDE HOUSING):** Shared IT services in housing
- **VIRIDIAN HOUSING:** Digital adventures at Viridian Housing
- **WAKEFIELD & DISTRICT HOUSING:** Transforming the business with hosted services
- **WHEATLEY GROUP:** A life-changing digital programme
- **WREKIN HOUSING TRUST:** Creating your own housing solution - The only limit is your own imagination
- **YOUR HOMES NEWCASTLE:** Agile software development in housing

#HTTOP5

Adam Rigg, New Media & Channel Specialist, Red Kite Community Housing

Welcome to the second #HTtop5... A deliciously spicy canapé of technology news, bundled in creative possibilities, sprinkled with innovation and served up on a tray of housing sector loveliness! A bit like a bacon and cheese wrap... but not as fattening and won't get your hands greasy.

Spectacles

Snap's Spectacles let users take 10-second videos by tapping a button on the top left-hand corner of the frame. Users can tap on the record button to record another 10-second segment. They can record videos up to 30 seconds long in all.

The videos can be stored locally or transmitted over wi-fi or Bluetooth to Android and iOS devices.

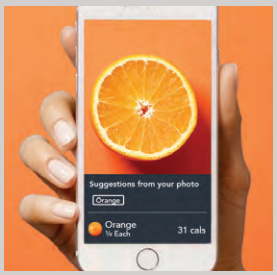
The spectacles can run for one day on a charge, according to Snap, and are recharged by placing them in their case. Spectacles will be available later this year for US$130, including the case. The glasses will be offered in black, teal, and coral, if you're interested.

Facebook at Work

Facebook has just released its new platform aimed at the workplace. It boasts a new, simpler way of sharing, searching, communicating and, well, Facebooking. While you can download the app already, you do currently need to have Facebook vet your business before they will let you have an account. There are other platforms out there that can do some or all of the features Facebook at Work is offering... but of course, they won't feel like Facebook.

Snap It

Have you heard of an app called Lose It? Basically, a weight-loss app that has added a clever new feature called Snap It. As the



title suggests, it's all to do with taking pictures. The user snaps a picture of the food they are about to eat and the app calculates how many calories you are about to devour. It's still a work in progress and the company claim it will get smarter over time, learning from users' input but the concept is being warmly received by app users who want to watch their weight but are too lazy to type.

Can you imagine how this technology could be used in housing? Why should a tenant have to actually type that their door needs repairing or that the fence outside has been vandalised or that an abandoned vehicle has been dumped in the car park? Where could this technology lead to – perhaps no more completing any online forms at all, just snap a picture and submit. They do say a picture paints a thousand words.

So maybe it's not so crazy to suggest that housing providers could add this feature to their apps, making it even easier for tenants to self-serve.

Purrmetrix

There are lots and lots of products out there claiming to be the next big thing in the world of smart home technology, many of them do the same thing as dozens of other similar products, and many of them don't stand out from the

crowd. However one company that I recently met at the SmartHome summit that did stand out to me was Purrmetrix.

Yes, they have a cool name and yes, their products do have a cat's face on them.

If you need to know more than that, then let me briefly explain. Purrmetrix offer a very cool sensor system that lets you monitor a property's heatmap and report on a big old range of performance statistics. Easy to install and just as easy to report from. They offer a starter kit for £190. Certainly worth a look at if you are a building professional looking at smart home systems or temperature monitoring systems... plus did I mention that they have a cool name and a cat's face on their products?

Google Home

Many of the big tech giants have realised that there is a space in our lives for a personal assistant hub speaker, basically a device in your home that allows easy access to a responsive, linked account.

So think of Apple Siri, Amazon Echo or Microsoft Cortana. Google's latest effort in this field is Google Home, a very sleek-looking little pod with a cool moving light on the top. The concept being you could ask it for any of the things you would ask one of the aforementioned assistants for, for example, "what appointments do I have today?" and it would efficiently let you know and perhaps ping a cheeky message to a mobile device.

Is it amazingly new and innovative? No. It's a bit similar to Amazon Echo by the looks of it but it is made by Google. Which means it will likely gain traction and stick with users. Which in turn means Google will develop it further and it may grow into an amazing life-changing device, embedded into homes across the land. The ultimate personal assistant? Not yet, but give it time. Imagine fitting these as standard in social housing. "Hey Google, when is my rent due?", "Hey Google, is my home being heated properly?", "Hey Google, my wife has left me because I talk to you more than her." That kind of thing.

Adam Rigg is a new media and channel specialist at Red Kite Community Housing.

SUPPLIER ENGAGEMENT – THE ADVENT CALENDAR CHALLENGE

Chris Cliffe, Director, CJC Procurement

An idea came to me during a recent commute. With the shopping days to Christmas rapidly counting down and as we start to look forward to the season's festivities, I thought about my son's advent calendar and the treats he'll find behind each door. Then I thought about a way to turn this into a productive challenge to build, reinforce and develop relationships with your technology suppliers.

Here's my idea. There are 17 working days this December, equating to 17 doors. Behind each day's door could be opportunity, problem resolution and innovation. The challenge is simple – to call a different technology supplier each day and have a conversation. Simple. Too simple perhaps. So there's a beginner, intermediate and advanced challenge, depending on how comfortable with supplier engagement you are.

Beginner level

The easiest suppliers to speak to should be the ones you currently do business with. Call one of your current suppliers each day during December. Thank them for their help this year, tell them what they've done well, and how they've helped you and your business. Also, tell them what you're looking forward to improving on with them in 2017.

Practically too, this is an opportunity to find out what the supplier's business hours will be over the festive period to ensure that contact arrangements and contingency plans are in place if required. Be interested in their plans for the festive break and make sure there's something in the diary for 2017 to continue the conversation.

Intermediate level

The intermediate level is to call a supplier you've never spoken to before (but which might be relevant to your business, of course). Find out what they do and how they do it. What have been their biggest achievements this year and what do they have planned for next year? By this stage, you are likely to have either ruled them in, or out, as being interesting for the future.

If they're of no interest, that's fine, but maybe they have something very relevant to offer you in 2017 and they could help you. If that's the case, book a follow-up meeting for January. And yes, public-sector friends, this is ok!

Advanced level

The hardest group of suppliers to call might be those that have responded to your RFx and tender processes this year but haven't won any of your business. Or suppliers whose contracts have expired and you've gone your separate ways. Call one of these suppliers each day during December to thank them once more for their participation in your process or previous contracts. Find out how business has been for them this year, and whether the feedback you gave them has been useful to them and how they have developed or improved. Ask them what they are looking forward to next year and think about whether there might be an opportunity to re-engage in the future.

Reward

While an advent calendar-themed challenge is a bit of fun, I hope the benefits of this challenge are obvious. From practical information such as opening hours over Christmas through to discussing, and potentially solving, real business problems. From identifying potential innovation opportunities to just finding out what your account manager is doing for Christmas, all of these conversations could add real value to you and your organisation.

Remember, as you walk past shop windows at this time of year, that you are your own personal shop window, and you are your organisation's shop window to its suppliers, past, present and future. These conversations will build your personal brand and your company's brand too. You might even have a list of ideas and opportunities to look forward to on that difficult first working morning after the New Year.

Share your stories

As it's the season for sharing, please connect with me (the usual places: LinkedIn or Twitter) and share your feedback on this challenge and on some of the conversations you've had. No one is going to check you've made 17 calls, but if everyone makes some calls, I'm sure there will be some direct value from it.

Chris Cliffe is the director of CJC Procurement.

GREEN CREDENTIALS FOR HOUSING CONTACT

Customer engagement specialist Housing Contact has appointed a new member of staff to liaise with its growing number of social housing clients. Stacey Green, who worked for five years at Southway Housing and Weaver Vale Housing, has joined the Housing Contact team as client manager.

Stacey Green, Client Manager, Housing Contact

Green's housing background is in digital inclusion and tenant engagement, working as a digital inclusion officer for two years at Southway Housing and helping with the development of social media and online services at Weaver Vale Housing.

Green said, "Working directly with hundreds of tenants has given me an insight into what really works. The customer contact software that we offer at Housing Contact enables housing providers to deal with the more complex issues they are facing, while maintaining high levels of income collection and increasing customer satisfaction rates."

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