

SEFAS INNOVATION

REDUCING COSTS AND IMPROVING SERVICES - HYBRID COMMUNICATIONS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND NHS TRUSTS

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THE TERM 'HYBRID MAIL' WILL BE FAMILIAR TO ANYONE WHO HAS BEEN TASKED WITH SAVING LOCAL AUTHORITY OR NHS MONEY. GETTING TO GRIPS WITH AD HOC AND SYSTEM-DRIVEN POSTAL VOLUMES, MAKING THEM MORE EFFICIENT TO REALISE SAVINGS, IS OFTEN IDENTIFIED AS ONE OF THE FIRST STEPS TO IMPROVE WORKING PRACTICES AND REDUCE OPERATIONAL COSTS.

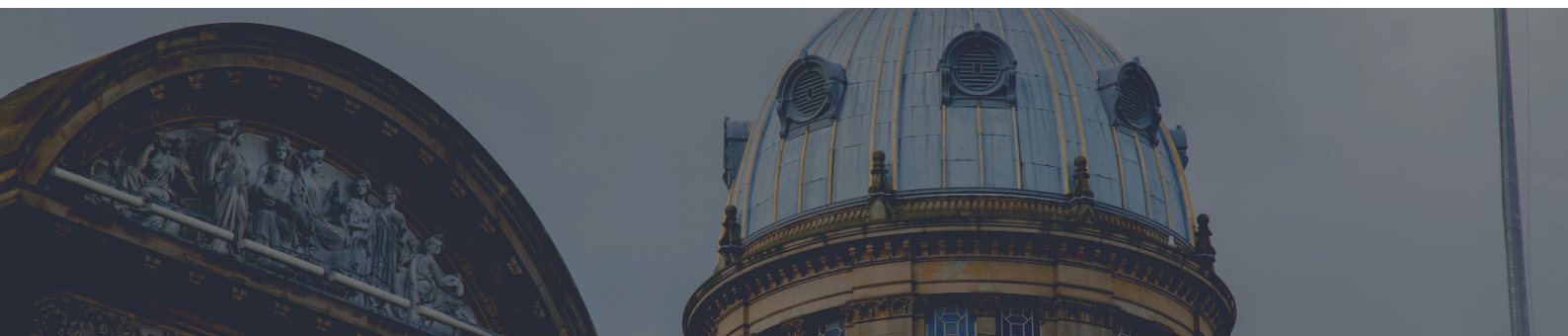
However, hybrid mail is only the first step on this efficiency journey. Hybrid mail tools that allow rationalisation of physical mail can be the cornerstone of a more fully integrated communications operation. This can efficiently marry physical and digital communications to provide better services across a range of critical communications channels, and make life safer, more flexible and more secure for citizens, patients and staff.

Sefas calls this extended capability **Hybrid Communications** and it can deliver significant benefits:

- **Hybrid communications** are much cheaper to send than standard post – typically people see a saving of 60% on printed mail, and with digital migration, that saving can be much more.
- Manual tasks are eliminated and people can focus on core activities, **increasing productivity** of office-based and remote workers.
- Hybrid communications allow **complex business rules** to ensure people are communicated through the recipient's 'channel of choice' with highly personalised, targeted information.
- Hybrid communications gives an organisation full control over **digital transformation** from printed to digital, allowing it to decide the pace and scope of change.
- Hybrid communications are produced within a fully auditable, **secure workflow environment**, giving local authorities and health trusts control, oversight and audit trails wherever needed. This capability ensures costly mistakes and wasteful practices are identified and eliminated.

In this paper Sefas looks at the challenges local authorities and health trusts are facing that make the benefits offered by hybrid communications a very attractive solution. It highlights the opportunities arising from these challenges, and presents a use case that illustrates the sophistication hybrid communication can offer to organisations who wish to serve people better and save money.

These challenges can be split into two broad categories: **organisational** challenges; and, **communication** challenges





ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES

The drive to improve communications often stems from challenges the local authority or health trust is facing as an organisation, which typically include:

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Across the board local authorities and health trusts are under pressure to improve operational efficiency to reduce costs – with increasing pressure to have staff focus on core activities rather than manual tasks.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

With government advice and regulations changing so rapidly, there is need to enable workers, and especially remote workers, to communicate with citizens and patients effectively, from wherever they need to be.

ADAPTING TO NEEDS

A way to ensure effective communication is to ensure ad-hoc and system-driven communications can adapt to citizen preferences and accessibility needs intuitively.

IT RESOURCE LIMITATIONS

Even within the largest local authorities and NHS trusts, IT resources are often overstretched. Finding ways of simplifying technology, so that end users do not need to rely on IT to make changes and adjustments, is crucial to relieve this pressure.

BRAND AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Giving staff more opportunities to interact with and send communications to citizens increases the risk of miscommunication, so organisations need to ensure consistency of brand and content and that there is full authorisation, approval and audit control across communications and delivery channels.

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

There are also specific challenges that a local authority faces to maintain effective customer communications, such as:

PRINTING & MAILING DOCUMENTS REMOTELY

Remote workers may not have the ability to print documents at home, and when they can, it is often to expensive desktop devices. Likewise mailing is often via expensive mailing options. Whilst access to network printers can resolve some issues, there is often no ability for remote workers to access a cost effective print and mail process.

LIMITED COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND ACCESSIBILITY

Despite the promise of digital transformation, many local authorities and health trusts still rely on printed mail to communicate with people. Digital channel shift is the goal, but lack of IT resources has limited the adoption of alternative digital communications channels for some authorities. The ability to send accessible communications for people with different and varying needs when it comes to reading them has also proven difficult to manage.

CULTURAL RESISTANCE

Cultural resistance is one of the main obstacles to change in business process. People are comfortable with the familiarity of existing ways of working, even though those ways might not be the best for the organisation. Changes to working methods need to be easy to implement, and the benefits evident to staff, especially if they need to be implemented rapidly in response to crisis.

MAINTAINING INTEGRITY

Regulatory, brand and content integrity across all outbound channels must be controlled, so communications are compliant with regulation, and they can be trusted by citizens and patients.



OPPORTUNITY THROUGH CHANGE

It is not hard to recognise the problems local authorities and health trusts are facing. Tackling these challenges can help any organisation realise savings, business improvements and efficiencies that benefit citizens, patients, staff...and the balance sheet. Hybrid communication solutions provide many benefits:

COST SAVINGS

Very simply, hybrid communication saves money when print and postage costs are reduced. Hybrid mail is cheaper to send than individual letters as it automatically produced and batched with larger mail runs for postal discounts, and digital communications offer even lower variable costs against printing and postage costs.

INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY AND LOYALTY

Freeing people up from the manual supporting tasks associated with ad hoc mail allows them to focus on core activities. Organisations will typically see increased productivity from both office based and remote workers. This can also demonstrate that a local authority or trust is investing in the safety of its workers, committed to making their jobs easier and focused on their professional development.

COMMUNICATIONS MEET CITIZEN NEEDS

Hybrid communications ensure that citizens are communicated with efficiently, effectively and inexpensively in the way that meets their choices and needs. This may mean simply getting emails instead of letters but can include more complex preference management, such as adapting output to braille text or alternative typefaces and colour schemes to aid visibility, automatically making contact through a text to speech service, or sending alternative, multi or simplified language versions.

MIGRATION TO DIGITAL

Hybrid communications make it easier for an organisation to control digital transformation, whether that means email, text messaging or sending communications to a secure portal – these can represent significant time and cost savings over print and post.

AUDIT TRACKING

It is often difficult to control who is printing or posting what in any organisation and charging individual cost centres often involves manual processing. Hybrid communications are produced within a fully auditable secure workflow environment, that provides Management Information to show how money is being spent and to help minimise waste, and the crucial data needed to implement plans for further savings.



HYBRID COMMUNICATIONS IN THE REAL WORLD

To further understand the possibilities represented by introducing hybrid communications, let's examine a sophisticated use case that can give an idea of how these capabilities can bring real world benefits to staff and citizens.

SCENARIO:

New Town Hospital Trust serves the community across a regional area of around 500,000 people. While forward thinking and working hard to meet the needs of local patients, budgets are tight, and the Trust is often under financial pressure while trying to make service improvements.

IDENTIFIED PROBLEM:

One area that has been identified as having room for improvement is the New Town Hospital appointment centre, which has an inefficient process for sending patient letters – and where existing processes will be familiar to many organisations who have to send timely communications.

Patient appointment letters have to inform patients when they are expected to attend New Town Hospital. These communications must be reliable, as miscommunications place stress on the patient, and cause missed appointments – a huge source of waste.

CURRENT STATE:

To ensure appointment notifications are delivered in a timely fashion, when New Town NHS appointment centre staff create, print and envelope letters, they will compare the date of the appointment with the date of issuance. If there is less than two weeks between those two dates they send the letter first class rather than their standard second class, the preferred choice when sufficient time allows - and if there are only a few days for the letter to reach the patient, they will book a courier to deliver the letter in person.

This is a typical manual supporting process that is prone to risk, as people inevitably make mistakes when selecting postage class, meaning either an appointment letter is sent with unnecessary expense, or the letter does not reach the patient in time. The manual process for checking dates is slow, and it requires continual attention to detail by people who could be doing more productive work. Additionally, as these letters are produced locally, appointment centre staff cannot work remotely.

To summarise, we have a clear example of an inefficient process that is costly, inflexible, and prone to human error.

ALMOST EIGHT MILLION HOSPITAL APPOINTMENTS WERE MISSED, OR 'DID NOT ATTEND', IN 2017/18, ACCORDING TO THE NHS - NOT INCLUDING APPOINTMENTS CANCELLED IN ADVANCE BY EITHER THE HOSPITAL OR THE PATIENT.

EACH HOSPITAL OUTPATIENT APPOINTMENT COSTS THE NHS APPROXIMATELY £120 - ALMOST £1 BILLION WORTH OF APPOINTMENTS WERE MISSED.

THE SOLUTION: INTELLIGENT HYBRID COMMUNICATIONS

To improve accuracy, reduce cost and improve the patient's experience, these processes need to be automated through a hybrid communications solution.

IMPROVED PRINT AND POSTAGE PROCESS:

Where a mailed letter is required by the patient, the appointment centre staff are now able to create a letter that is automatically produced, enveloped, batched and sorted for postal discounts in the mailroom, with no manual printing and checking required by the appointment centre staff at all.

At the same time, the duration between required production date of the letter and the appointment date is provided by the system. Under pre-set business rules the class of delivery switches from standard second class to first class where appropriate.

There is no supervision or intervention from appointment staff required, and no risk of mistakes that could cause a patient to miss an appointment or for staff to send a letter by an unnecessarily expensive route.

In the case of urgent fringe cases requiring hand delivery, the hybrid communications solution will remove that communication from the standard production batch, and divert to a local office printer instead for handling by onsite staff. These fringe cases are automatically flagged to staff so they are aware of this issue and can handle the mail appropriately.



CHANNEL PREFERENCES AND ACCESSIBILITY:

The hybrid communication solution offers the power to intelligently manage the preferences and accessibility needs of intended recipients with sophisticated business rules.

New Town Hospital Trust will automatically send communications via the patient's preferred channel, such as email, SMS or delivery to a web portal. The solution adds the same communication content to internal and external archival systems for future retrieval and reference, if required.

Application of business rules make these hybrid communications accessible through a variety of methods to ensure anybody can read them, regardless of different level of ability. For example, a patient may require specific accessibility standards, such as needing to receive a large font, easy-read document, or require an alternative production of the communication by a Braille printer.

So when the patient record reveals a need for braille print, a text to speech service or an increased text sizing, it is selected and produced automatically.

DELIVERING VALUE

A hybrid communications solution will allow the Trust to save money, improve the patient experience, allow staff to focus on core activity and reduce waste.

HOW SEFAS CAN HELP

Sefas provides hybrid communications capabilities to a variety of local authorities, NHS Trusts, government departments and private enterprises. The benefits this way of working brings to organisations with critical communications functions at the heart of service provision will typically include the following:

- **SIGNIFICANT SAVINGS** - Hybrid communications are much cheaper to send than standard post – typically people see a saving of 60% on printed mail, and by shifting mail volumes to digital, variable costs can be reduced further.
- **INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY** - Manual tasks are eliminated and people can focus on core business activities meaning organisations see increased productivity from both office based and remote workers.
- **SEND THE RIGHT COMMUNICATIONS, THE RIGHT WAY** - Hybrid communications allow complex business rules to be introduced into office communications which ensures that patients and citizens are communicated with efficiently, effectively and inexpensively in the way that meets their individual (GDPR) choices and needs.
- **SHIFT TO DIGITAL** - Hybrid communications give a local authority or NHS trust full control over the shift of its communications from printed to digital, as they decide the pace and scope of change, and guide citizens and patients to adopt preferences that suit them and will save the authority money.
- **MITIGATE RISK, BUILD FOR THE FUTURE** - All hybrid communications are produced within a fully auditable secure workflow environment. The authority has control, oversight and audit trail wherever needed, providing the ability to report and plan with evidence, as costly mistakes and wasteful practices are identified and eliminated.