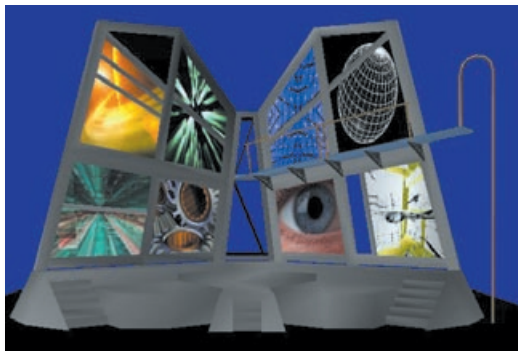




# Xolve



### Background

**Xolve, a specialist design and engineering consultancy in the entertainment technology market, implemented a peer-to-peer software solution to support their business model that was based upon expertise and intellectual property as the key value assets for customers.**

The company, established in 2004 by Neil Darracott, provides core services including engineering design, new product development, conceptual problem solving, innovation and design management. The business operates beyond local boundaries, in response to niche market drivers which are geographically transparent. Xolve's customers are leaders in their respective fields, supplying to high profile commercial and public entertainment events and installations. Whilst these customers – and their relationship with specialists such as Xolve – remain behind the scenes, the end clients are more high profile. In their first year of trading, Xolve worked on projects including the Kylie Showgirl tour, the Blue Man Group in London's West End and on a bespoke design for Ford Motor Company's environment at the major motor shows.

### Business objectives

Neil comments: "Working with associates and clients who are based around the UK, we needed a means of internally retaining, developing and sharing expertise. ICT was the key infrastructure needing

investment at start-up rather than premises and staff. The ability to work remotely and collaboratively was paramount and required a system that could be easily shared and understood, was intuitive within the business and had practical application."

### ICT Strategy

On completion of their business plan Xolve developed an ICT strategy that had three key objectives:

- ★ To have a robust, commonly accessible system that allowed for universal storage
- ★ To facilitate their operational, development and remuneration activities, aiming for ICT and geographical transparency
- ★ To establish partnerships with local ICT experts for support and development.

They approached the National Business to Business Centre: a DTi-funded initiative providing free and impartial e-business support and advice, to review their strategy and give advice on the relevant tools required to achieve their objectives.

Following an initial meeting and a review of Xolve's ICT Strategy a consultant from the Centre recommended three possible options that would allow for remote and collaborative working: having their own in-house server; using an ASP hosting service; or using a peer-to-peer software solution.

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# Xolve

## Peer to Peer Solution

The third option was deemed the most appropriate; Neil recognised that although he was computer literate it was not his area of expertise. He wanted an easy-to-manage solution that allowed him to focus on running the business and the work in hand.

The Centre recommended a trial of Groove Virtual Office, an online software tool that allows users to work together without needing to be in the same physical location. Files, projects and meetings can all be accessed via the internet, without the need for secure servers or virtual private networks.

In July 2005 Xolve took out a 90-day free trial of Groove collaboration software. Neil wanted to follow a process that allowed him to trial it in-house before involving clients or purchasing licenses.

Neil comments: "The value of prototyping is something we advocate to our customers. It can be hard to walk the talk, but for this we were determined to do so – and implement our ICT in a managed way." An initial trial, with non-critical data, was followed by limited internal use on a live project, before the third phase which implemented peer-to-peer networking across the business. Each stage was evaluated before embarking on the next; though not without difficulties this did control the risks and help ensure a successful outcome. Neil continues: "As we'd expect with any prototype – though we pride ourselves in our ability to

design right first time – this has been a learning process; hopefully one that's enabled us to increase our efficiency as we continue to apply the technology in the future."

By December 2005 Xolve decided to implement Groove within the business and began to use it with customers. They also used it with their external IT support providers, who went on to purchase Groove licences for their own organisation.

*"We have created a methodology for managing information in the business that fits into a coherent way of operating."*

## Benefits and Issues

The key benefits of the new system include:

- ★ A robust system that meets Xolve's ICT objectives
- ★ The ability to work with any Groove user from any geographical location
- ★ The flexibility to select the tools required within the package
- ★ A system that allows for the integration of managing files
- ★ Low overheads for implementation and maintenance.

When asked if they had any problems or issues with the system, Neil commented: "A new system is a distraction to learn and implement

and communicate with workers and customers, and is also another overhead. We do not always fully utilise all of the tools available within the software. As a micro business we can struggle to receive priority support, something we had to overcome in partnership with the Groove reseller. In essence the negative side is outweighed by the positive; we have created a methodology for managing information in the business that fits into a coherent way of operating."

## The future

Going forward Xolve continue to travel towards their ICT objectives and realise further benefits from peer-to-peer technologies. They plan to exploit other ICT for remote and collaborative working, including Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) device integration and web-based hosted facilities.

*If you would like to talk to Xolve about their experience, or find out how your business can achieve what they did, contact the National Business to Business Centre now at [www.nb2bc.co.uk](http://www.nb2bc.co.uk). To see how companies like yours have addressed their e-business issues visit the showcase area of our website at [www.nb2bc.co.uk/showcases](http://www.nb2bc.co.uk/showcases)*



## The National Business to Business Centre

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