

NS&I's award-winning Contact Centres handled over 3.4 million customer calls and emails in 2008–09



Our partners

In the face of unprecedented demand during 2008–09, our ability to deliver the consistently high service levels we achieved was dependent on the work of our partners.

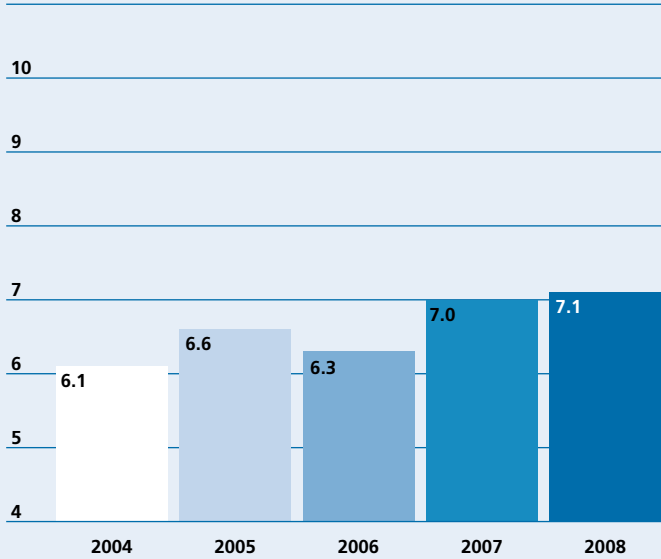
Stronger than ever

Our partnership with Siemens has now been operating for 10 years, and we are delighted to report that the partnership score is at its highest level ever.* This survey (below) also noted there is a 'closer working relationship between NS&I and Siemens than often would be seen in a single organisation'.

Partnership scores

This graph shows partner scores year on year. The partnership survey consists of the same 22 questions which have been asked each year to members of both organisations.

Rating (scale of 1 to 10)



That performance is even more impressive when set against the backdrop of unprecedented volumes of traffic in our Contact Centres and operational centres. Our UK-based customer Contact Centres were also supported by a 'back office' team in Chennai, India. At the height of the 'flight to safety', sales increased significantly, yet all service delivery targets – in terms of timeliness, accuracy and customer satisfaction – were still met.

Throughout this period we were still able to continue to take forward some strategic initiatives to strengthen the back office. A new workflow system has been introduced to accelerate processing and ensure accuracy and consistency in dealing with all customer records. We are also beginning to benefit from increased channel integration: we are well advanced with a project enabling call centre agents to identify and verify customers more quickly, and to have a better understanding of transaction history – enabling further service improvements.

These initiatives are evidence of a partnership that doesn't just focus on 'business as usual', but draws on a profound understanding of each other's operations and culture to continually seek improvements. Looking back over the 10 years we have worked together, there are tangible achievements in all areas.

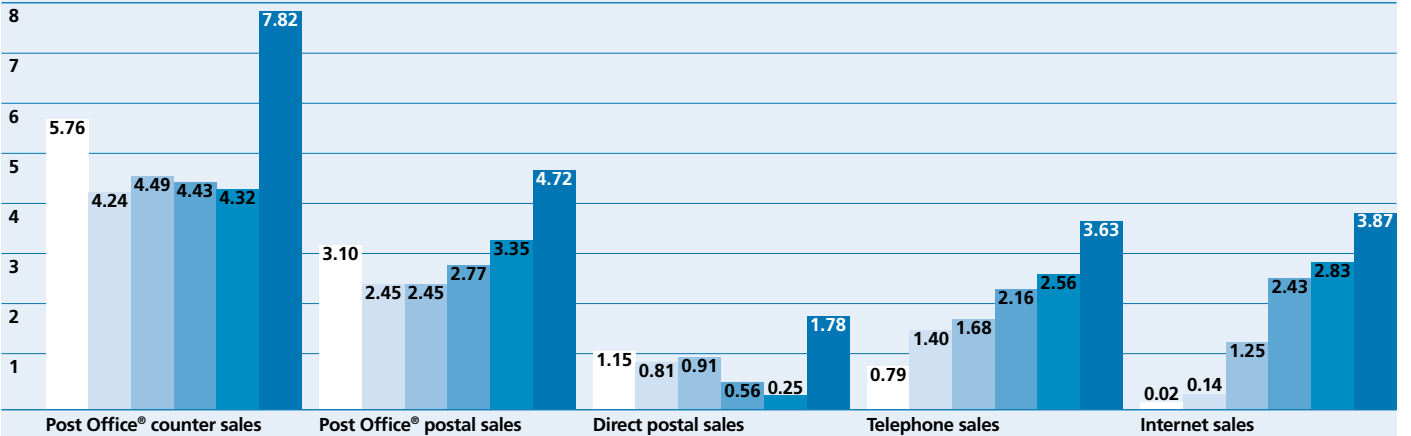
- On a 'like for like' basis, stripping out the impact of growth and inflation, core operations cost has been reduced by around 55%.
- The operational services delivered by the partnership have become much more efficient. In 1999 the operations teams delivered the administration to support £14 million of customer investments per person. Today that figure has risen to an average of £55 million per person. In addition to lowering our costs to meet government savings targets, we have been able to reinvest in modernising our systems, improving service and developing products for our customers, as well as reducing the overall cost of running NS&I.
- The average customer request is now fulfilled in 3 days – down from 11 days when the partnership started.

* Source: Measured by Service Matters – an independent third party specialising in this area

Sales performance by principal channels

2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
2006-07	2007-08	2008-09

£ billion



Meeting demand in exceptional circumstances

When the 'flight to safety' began in mid-September 2008, there was an immediate surge in calls. Working together, NS&I and Siemens quickly put into effect the contingency plan we had developed following our experiences in autumn 2007. The rapid response team – drawn from NS&I and Siemens – took over decision-making. Shift patterns were changed and our 'virtual' UK-based call centre maximised the number of staff available to speak to customers.

There are many stories of exceptional commitment during this period – staff coming in from leave, working long hours and even heading straight into work from the airport the minute they landed back from holiday. This commitment to customers, to the NS&I brand and to their colleagues was vital not only in coping with the demand, but also in maintaining team spirit.

It is therefore immensely to the credit of all Siemens staff – call centre agents, the back office processing team and the partnership managers – that customer satisfaction remained so high during this period, and throughout the year.

Our distribution partners

The Post Office®

Investing in NS&I's products through the Post Office® proved a familiar option for savers who looked to invest with NS&I during the financial uncertainty last year. We are very grateful to the Post Office® and its staff in branches around the country, who helped these customers invest with us at a time when so many people were reviewing their finances.

Our two organisations continue to work closely together, and a sound governance structure oversees not only the contract between NS&I and the Post Office® but also how the overall relationship is working on a day-to-day basis. As the Post Office® continues to develop a range of Post Office-branded financial service offers, it is particularly important that clarity exists between the Post Office's® offer and ours. Much effort has been invested in ensuring that customers clearly understand and can differentiate between the respective offers, and we have worked closely with Post Office® colleagues to help their staff understand the benefits offered by NS&I products.

We fully support the Post Office's® ambitions to improve the customer experience, particularly in larger branches, and are fully engaged in their process to modernise offices across the network. We also recognise the important role that the Post Office® plays in the broader community, and have been a major supporter of the 'People's Post Office' Awards.

WHSmith

We have now completed the first full year of our partnership with WHSmith and are pleased to be able to offer this additional high street presence. Customer literature on three key products (Premium Bonds, Inflation-beating Savings and Income Bonds) is on display in over 400 high street stores and 155 travel stores.

It has increased our profile with our customers and we are working closely with WHSmith to discuss how best to further develop the partnership.

Intermediaries

While NS&I has no commercial relationship with Independent Financial Advisers (IFAs) we are fully aware that many NS&I customers seek and receive advice from this source. We therefore ensure that the IFA community is able to receive prompt and detailed information on NS&I product and price changes as they occur. NS&I also works closely with and supports key industry professional bodies (for example the Institute of Financial Planning and the Personal Finance Society) to ensure that the benefits offered by NS&I products are fully understood by their members.