



Case study: AO, Semafone and 360 Solutions

AO Boosts Call Handling Capacity and Keeps Sensitive Customer Payment Data Secure

About the Organisation

On a mission to become the best electrical retailer in Europe, online electricals retailer AO.com operates at the forefront of online retail innovation.

Offering 4,000 products and serving more than 1.3 million customers, AO has experienced exponential growth since it was first founded in 2000. Today it's become a multi-country business, with operations in 18 locations across three territories – the UK, Germany and the Netherlands.

Committed to giving customers the best shopping experience possible, AO's call centres are of crucial importance to the business. Over 400 call centre agents are on hand at any one time to help online customers with their order placement or delivery queries.

It's a highly dynamic environment in which thousands of incoming calls, live web chats and email queries are all handled simultaneously – and where agents following up with customers can generate up to several thousand outbound calls a day.

The Challenge

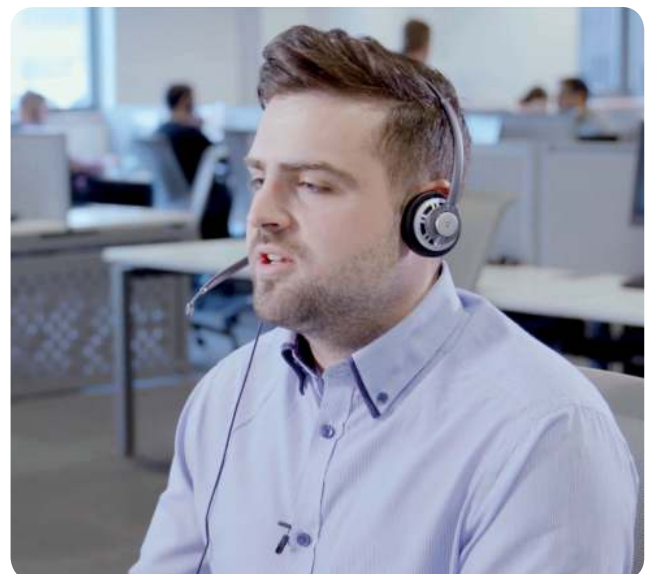
The sheer number of calls handled by AO's call centres can jump dramatically during peak retail times like Black Friday, Christmas, long weekends and seasonal sale periods. But AO's legacy ISDN lines were hampering its ability to cope with these demand spikes. And that meant long hold times, abandoned calls and a poor experience for customers.

But that wasn't all. Trust and transparency is at the foundation of everything AO does and it wanted to ensure that expansion of its inbound and outbound call lines wouldn't compromise customer payment security.

With new EU GDPR data protection legislation due to come into effect in May 2018, AO was determined to take every step possible to ensure that customer payments taken over the phone were secure. As a trusted customer brand, protecting customer data and minimising any risk that sensitive customer information could be compromised is of paramount importance to AO.

The Solution

To overcome these challenges, AO chose Semafone and 360 Solutions. Implementing Semafone's solution would ensure that all over-the-phone payments would be PCI DSS compliant, and that customer data would be kept safe. Meanwhile, 360's SIP trunking solution would provide a much more flexible and resilient inbound phone service.





With Semafone's payment security software in place, customers are able to input their payment card details directly into their telephone keypad. These numbers are obscured from the call centre using dual tone multi frequency (DTMF) masking. So, while it's impossible for agents to hear or see a customer's card details they are still able to remain in full voice communication with callers to help out with any issues that may arise during the payment process.

“Semafone and 360 Solutions went beyond the call of duty to ensure we were able to maintain continuity of service for customers during the implementation phase. Our agents have found the system really easy to use and feedback from customers has been very positive. Not only are they happier about being able to remain in contact with agents throughout the entire call – they also truly appreciate the additional level of payment security we've put in place.”

Adam Warne – IT Director, AO

Semafone's patented payment method sends payment card numbers straight to the payment service provider (PSP), completely bypassing AO's internal contact centre IT infrastructure. Fully scalable, the solution can easily cope with demand peaks to ensure every payment is taken securely.

To ensure customers can always get through and speak to an agent, no matter how many callers are trying to reach the contact centre, 360 Solutions would boost capacity by supplementing AO's existing phone system with 390 additional SIP channels.

Giving AO the capacity to cope with 600 concurrent calls at peak periods by delivering telephone lines over IP using SIP protocols, this meant AO would gain the bandwidth needed to cope with seasonal demand. What's more, the solution would also give AO the ability to divert calls to back-up locations or mobile phones instantly, and from anywhere, to achieve truly dynamic call loading capabilities during peak periods.

The Implementation

It was imperative the contact centre stayed up and running at all times. So any implementation and testing had to be undertaken out of hours after 10pm.

Throughout the process key stakeholders from Semafone, 360 Solutions and AO worked together seamlessly to oversee the two primary work streams: the 'voice capture' project team would undertake the SIP implementation and phone line number migration, while the 'payment' team was responsible for building and integrating the new secure payment process into AO's payment capture screen.

Following the successful go-live, training workshops for AO's in-house trainers were led by Semafone.

The Benefits

The new secure payment and voice capture systems have delivered multiple benefits:

- PCI DSS compliance for all payments taken over the phone has been achieved – a key business requirement for AO
- Migrating from ISDN to SIP has provided significant benefits including flexibility and scalability
- AO now has the scalability needed to cope with peak times and seasonal demands – ensuring customer service commitments can be maintained at all times
- The flexibility of the combined solution means AO can quickly handle expansion into new markets – agent seats can be added or removed as needed

