



# LONDON'S CALLING

M&G's MyWorkplace app provides an excellent visitor experience to its HQ and beyond



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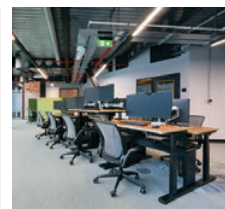
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# WORKPLACE COMPANION

Leading saving and investment company, M&G plc has invested in the MyWorkplace app from Spica Technologies to support its employee and visitor experience globally. FMJ visited M&G's head office in London's Fenchurch Avenue to see it in action

**D**ue to the pandemic the estates and facilities management sector has moved from dabbling in technology to embracing a range of digital workplace solutions to ensure premises are safe and support changed work patterns. Now a growing number are investing in workplace experience apps that offer a virtual connection for end users and workplace managers.

Sarah O'Reilly is Global Head of CRE Workplace Solutions at Global saving and investment company M&G, responsible for the property that M&G owns and operates, as opposed to the investment estate. Her team aims to provide a fantastic user experience for colleagues and visitors to M&G offices, be it the London HQ, one of the UK buildings or overseas.

"We're pretty focused on the end user experience because that is why we exist, to make sure we've got the right workplace locations as well as create a great experience for colleagues," she explains.

"We had online solutions for booking meeting rooms, a car park space or a lift share but they were all on different systems. We didn't have anything that was integrated. Enabling people to manage their time in the office was something we were striving to achieve so we wanted to explore new ways of supporting that."

Prior to COVID the estates team were looking at ways to enhance the end user experience, by offering colleagues an app on their phone or their laptop which would enable them to easily find the kind of space they needed for the task they were doing.

Says O'Reilly: "We wanted something that was fundamentally different from everything we had that replicated people's expectation of an app but within the work environment. Something which was fast, dynamic, and very user friendly that would refresh constantly as you have to work to keep people's attention. So that was our primary driver, something that was different. We don't want to be ordinary as a team, we want to be an exceptional provider for colleagues."

## MYWORKPLACE APP

They opted to go with Spica Technologies, the SmartCloud division of parent company Nordomatic, whose technology encompasses software and hardware

solutions for the management of workplaces, energy and BMS. They came up with the M&G MyWorkplace app, aimed at employees, visitors and contractors, that offers a range of features to help streamline the workplace experience; whether booking desks, lockers, showers or parking spaces, familiarising yourself with the layout of a particular M&G building or raising a request to the onsite facilities team.

The range of features on the app, explains M&G Business Support Manager Jonathan Gingell, has been a boon to his team, whose aim is “to give people the best experience from the moment they enter the door”.

In order to test its veracity, a pilot was conducted in the M&G offices in Edinburgh with a small number of users, which says Gingell: “People were very receptive to and we were surprised by how easy people found it to use. It is very much a ‘get up and go’ app.

“In September 2021 a wider launch took place. With people being out for so long they want to know in advance when they’re coming in so it gave us a good shop window, so people knew the exact environment they were coming into and what COVID measures were in place.”

**MAKING CHANGES**

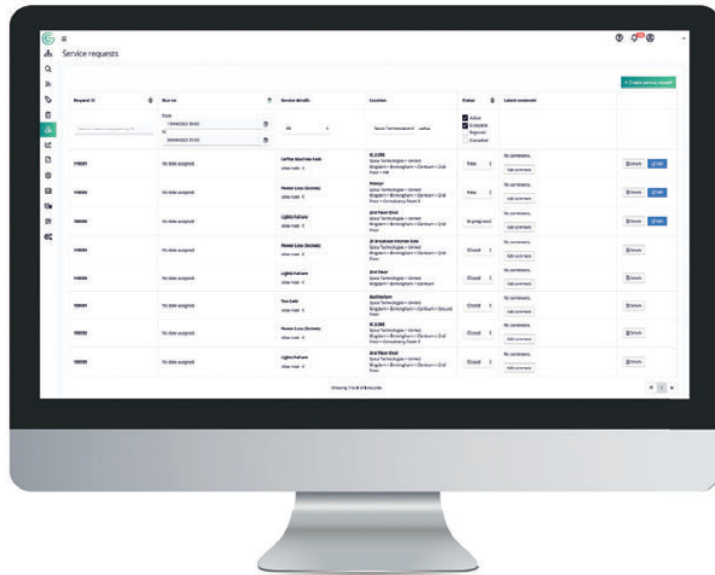
Alongside the virtual solution, during the pandemic, M&G monitored global work patterns and carried out remote viability assessments amongst all the managers within the business to help determine how they and their teams wanted to work going forward.

Says O’Reilly: “With that information we looked at the workplaces we were providing and the mix of collaboration and focused space and in some buildings, made alterations based on demand. The London HQ for example has gone through quite a lot of change to adjust to how the different teams want to work. For example, you’ve got investment teams and you’ve got tech teams for whom collaboration means very different things, so we need to create environments that deal with both.”

“The lockdown gave us a chance to reset,” adds Gingell. “During that period off we were able to design in more collaborative areas within different buildings and lay it out nice and clearly within the app. This made it easier to get people to come back into the building and buy into it, which helped them adapt to how they were going to use the space again.”

The app has also been invaluable in helping to support hybrid working patterns, for instance linking to sensors which show how different areas of the buildings are being used which can inform the services team on how frequently washrooms are cleaned.

Says O’Reilly: “One of the issues people find is that they come to the office and the people they want to meet aren’t there, so the app enables



them to coordinate that so they can come in at the same time, sit in the same place and see who else is there and meet up. In this way they stay connected and make the best use of being in the workplace.”

The app is also designed to make the transition from the home space to the work space as easy as possible, says Gingell. “We’re competing with an office space where you wake up and head to your own kitchen so our space needs to be as seamless as it can be, and the app gives us the scope to manage that. For instance, the app knows how many times people are using the kitchenette and for us, being able to look at the data and see we’re sending someone out every fortieth

visit to fix the machine, we can determine to arrange to service it more regularly. The result is an experience in the office where there is always coffee, the washrooms are spotless, and you’re not having to take any side steps in your daily journey to do your job, so it just feels effortless.”

Another huge advantage for users is that in such a large office as the M&G HQ in central London, the app allows users to find people. You simply put in their name on the app and it will show you the floor plan and lead you to their space. It can also advise users on what’s going on in the building so they can plan their visits, whether it’s a Pilates session, a special menu, or simply who is planning to be in on certain days so they can meet up with a range of colleagues.

Says O’Reilly: “Because the app is an extension of a form of technology we’re all using every day, people feel comfortable with it. Our challenge has been to stop being property people so instead of a lot of words with the app there is just lots of functionality you can use quickly and easily. It’s quite a mindset change for us, for as soon as we

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make this laborious we'll lose the traction we've got, so we've got to add functionality to keep that interest there."

She adds: "Part of the decision of going with Spica was because we knew we'd have to go through a lot of changes so we wanted a partner that was willing to work in a very agile way. I think we're probably quite demanding as a client because we're always asking 'how can we push this?' and we're equally passionate about making the product as great as we possibly can.

"We say to Spica, 'if you don't see the value of [an update] challenge us', and that we will respect that but equally, the ideas that we have help Spica's product develop as well, so it's a very symbiotic relationship, which is what makes it as successful as it is.

"We've had to put a lot of governance around how we prioritise features, because everyone wants everything and how do we make those decisions in terms of resources – so that's been a really good discipline for us to say, 'why are we doing it?' 'how is that going to work?'"

"Having put that governance in, we found that there were features that we thought about that we thought were fairly minor, actually gave us opportunities to do a lot more. It has been a bit of a revelation just watching how people use the app. There were things we wanted to do and when we

saw how people were using the app realised 'we don't need that'. People find their own ways to do stuff which is really interesting to watch."

#### DATA ADVANTAGE

Being a financial services firm M&G's people do like data, so when the workplace solutions team is dealing with different parts of the business, when some question

if they have enough space, or where are their people going to be based, the app helps estates demonstrate how in reality the space is being utilised.

Says Gingell: "I think that's one of the most powerful elements of the app. People might interpret their space quite differently – for instance it might feel quite busy, but when we have a look at the data we can see that actually it's not quite where they thought it was and we can see where there are gaps. We can also track which days people are coming in and work with teams to ensure they are getting the most out of their space before making any physical changes."

The technology also helps to streamline services, giving users the option of informing

the property help desk if there is an issue. For instance, if they go to the coffee machine and it's not working they can scan it on the QR code and it will automatically create a ticket they can track. But the ultimate aim is to identify any issues before it happens.

Says Gingell: "If you're an FM working on the site it's a useful way of determining how we can proactively respond to things. We've got around 4,000 sensors around our UK estate and we want it to show us the state of assets as it happens. For example, when it comes to monitoring energy use, with our environmental sensors if we know they are deviating from our parameters."

"In fact, the level of data has given us and Spica challenges so they've created a level of functionality on the dashboards to see what works and pull data out that is genuinely insightful."

M&G's MyWorkplace app has understandably been very well received by the property service teams as well as end users, but what about the board?

Says O'Reilly: "They're massively supportive of the app, of what we are doing and that we are creating really efficient workplaces, so it's got a lot of profile. Like everyone else ESG is massively important to M&G and sustainability is at the heart of everything we do, from an energy perspective, carbon perspective, or indeed a wellbeing perspective. The app gives us a fantastic data point that we can then use to show the value add and also to constantly improve, so it's really valuable."

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