



BPL offers a wide range of leisure facilities – from exercise classes to golf courses. By transforming processes using technology, Mark and his team is putting customer experience is at the heart of all of them.

Overview



There is no doubt that of all the industries affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, the leisure and hospitality sector has been one of the hardest hit. But for Barnsley Premier Leisure (BPL), digital transformation has been a big factor in ensuring there's light at the end of the tunnel.

Running this programme has been Chief Technology Manager Mark Kendrick, supported by his small, but mighty, team – and his partners here at AdEPT.

“As with all digital transformation work, it can feel like a never-ending project,” explains Mark. “We’ve come a long way, and we’ve got more work to do.

“Being a not-for-profit social enterprise, our surpluses are put back into improving the business. And we must always deliver great value to everyone – from the local authorities we serve, to the people who use our facilities.

“To do this, it comes down to focusing on our customers and members, putting them at the heart of everything we do.”

Those customers benefit from BPL's diverse portfolio of facilities spread across Barnsley and the surrounding areas. On offer are golf courses, swimming pools, a bowling alley, an arena, several leisure centres, bars and cafés.

And while these venues have been uncharacteristically empty for most of the year, Mark is optimistic about returning to normality. He firmly believes the innovations he has led will give customers even more reason to come back – and keep coming back.

Central to these innovations – and making progress on them throughout the pandemic – has been the introduction of Microsoft services. In turn, this has seen the partnership between BPL and AdEPT go from strength to strength.

“For BPL and its future beyond the pandemic, digital transformation is about putting our people, our customers and our members at the heart of everything we do.”

—
Mark Kendrick, Chief Technology Manager, **BLP**



Situation



“I joined BPL about three years ago,” says Mark. “And when I arrived, quite rightly, the organisation’s main focus was on delivering health and fitness services.

“But having come from working in education, I’d always been a big fan of self-study – making a point of staying on top of technology developments. So I quickly saw there were ways we could do things at BPL slightly differently.”

Mark met with Mike McEwen, an AdEPT Director based in our Doncaster branch. And right from their initial meeting, they knew they first needed to understand the organisation, the staff, the processes and, most of all, the customer needs.

So ahead of the transformative work and before adopting any new technology, Mark and Mike worked together to get a real handle on BPL.

“When I joined, we didn’t have a clear picture of memberships,” explains Mark. “And we also relied on paper for everything.

“Working this way means it is challenging to track and manage data at the best of times, but doing so across separate sites can make it impossible.”

Mark believes many leisure providers across the country will recognise the drawbacks of working with paper-based systems – for everything from logging equipment faults, to signing up new members. So by working closely with AdEPT, he set about streamlining and

automating as many of these processes as possible, freeing up time to focus on improving staff and customer experience. And Microsoft became BPL’s springboard to achieving many of these ambitions.

Solution



AdEPT is a Microsoft Gold Partner – and to achieve this accreditation, our staff have passed rigorous checks in everything from application development to cloud platform management. Both of these areas proved valuable for Mark and BPL.

“We identified about 40 or 50 processes we wanted to improve with technology,” says Mark. “And by working with AdEPT, we were able to see not only what we could do, but also how we could do it a little differently.”

As part of this programme, Mark and Mike addressed the long-running issue of inconsistent data.

“We used Microsoft Power BI – Microsoft’s business intelligence tool – to build dashboards to get a live picture of the organisation. We’ve got about 40 of them now, and we can instantly see everything in one place.

“For example, I can see how many members we’ve got, what they’re booking and their demographics. This helps us plan everything from the classes we might run for members, to the way we might engage with them. Say we see more

interest in yoga, we might also decide to put on more classes in similar activities, like pilates, to keep members interested.

“We also use Power BI to get a real understanding of internal data. For instance, we’ve used it throughout the pandemic to track how many staff are on furlough, where they’re working, and to plan shifts.”

As Power BI became embedded into BPL, so too did other Microsoft products and services. And they all proved beneficial for staff and customers alike.

“We were established with Microsoft before the pandemic,” explains Mark. “So when we all started working from home, it didn’t take much to get going with Teams so we could all keep working and stay in touch.

“And in respect of keeping up staff morale, we also developed a staff Intranet. So we now have a central place that staff can visit, wherever they are, to stay in touch, and feel like they’re part of the organisation.

“We’ve also created a training programme for staff – all the materials are available through the Intranet. We wanted to ensure that even though staff weren’t doing their normal work, they still felt like their own professional development was continuing.”

Mark and his work with AdEPT didn’t stop there. Even throughout the pandemic – and without face-to-face contact – the organisations

have made new discoveries and taken more pioneering steps.

“One of the things I like about working with AdEPT is that it’s a real partnership,” says Mark. “When you work with AdEPT, you get an extension of the team. One that can look at things differently and say ‘have you thought about doing it this way?’.

“I remember we had a lengthy talk about Microsoft Dynamics 365. We were thinking that we’d like to use it, but I had the impression it was only useful for corporations, like the big Formula 1 teams.

“I thought it would be far too big for a leisure provider,” adds Mark. “But then I talked to AdEPT and they opened my eyes to how it could be adapted to work in smaller organisations.”

Another way AdEPT has helped BPL is through the use of Microsoft Power Apps. These are small, low-code applications that can automate everyday processes, sparing staff from monotonous tasks and reducing keying errors.

“Working with Mike’s colleague Nick, we’ve just created an app to streamline the maintenance schedule and fault reporting for

gym equipment,” says Mark.

“Now, all a team member has to do to scan the barcode on the equipment, and they can log that it’s been checked, or can report a fault, which in turn automatically emails a support ticket to the manufacturer.

“Of course, this sounds like a small thing but when you add up all the small things, they make a big difference,” adds Mark. “And this process is part of something much more important too – the safety of our members.”

It’s been a busy time for Mark and his team. But all of the work underpins the bigger picture: to engage customers and members and give them the best possible experience.

“Next in the plan is switching our leisure management system,” says Mark. “I think a lot of leisure providers will identify with this. Some of these systems started their life in the 80s and 90s, so they’re just not fit for purpose anymore.

“But you can’t do this overnight. You have to plan it out in detail. Especially as we want to do this in a way that means we can give members their own online account – so they can manage their bookings,

track their health, see their progress, and so on.”

While the pandemic has, of course, affected BPL, it has only strengthened Mark’s resolve to press ahead with these plans to improve member experience.

“We’ve recently rebranded and redesigned our Fitness Flex package, and we launched virtual classes through the pandemic – so we’re already well on the way to doing this. And one of the most rewarding scenarios where this is concerned is when we get NHS referrals.

“Because we’ve streamlined processes and eliminated paper, we’re finding the turnaround from a referral to a fully-fledged member is much shorter – and their experience is much more joined-up.

“If you can do that for every member, you can keep them happy and coming back – ultimately improving their health and their life. And really, that’s what it’s all about.

For more information, visit <https://www.bpl.org.uk/>.

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