

Channel Shift Case Study

Guidance Area #7:	Identify and Minimise Security Risks
Provided By:	Land Registry
Sector:	Central Government
Service:	e-Document Registration Service

Land Registry's e-Document Registration Service (eDRS) allows business account holders to submit property transactions and receive results electronically. Customers using the service need a valid business account with Land Registry. This means that fees will be paid by variable direct debit, removing the need for offline payments.

The service:

- reduces paper and postage costs
- removes postal delays
- provides audit trail reporting tools to help with fraud prevention
- allows Land Registry to monitor the service

The eDRS service was launched in December 2012. It's currently used by about 25% of target customers, handling about 1,700 transactions per month. Land Registry plans to increase take-up of eDRS through raising customers' awareness of the service's benefits.

Service users are usually qualified solicitors or licensed conveyancers because the work is highly regulated by external professional bodies (law society, council of mortgage lenders, etc). Some of the work is handled by administrative support staff or is outsourced to offshore operators, usually with internal supervision (practice managers etc) from within the business account holders. All business account holders - whether a qualified solicitor, licensed conveyancer, administrative staff, or an outsourced overseas operator - can use eDRS once registered.

Project process

Land Registry recognised that many of their service users would approach an electronic service from a 'risk averse' perspective - the nature of the documents being handled requires a certain level of security and assurance.

Therefore it was important that Land Registry took action to address them during the development of eDRS, and explained what they were doing to their customers in language (plain English) that customers understood.

Various measures have been put in place to ensure the security of eDRS including:

- compliance with existing and recognised international security standards (eg ISO 27001, ISO 20000 and BS 10008)
- taking independent advice from specialists on digital certificates and on the architectural design of the service
- incremental penetration testing of both the eDRS portal and the business gateway throughout their development
- independently monitoring conformance against standards - at least every six months - with internal audit processes to oversee the technical and business operations aspects of eDRS
- audit logs to provide evidential weight and legal admissibility of the electronic information
- 24-hour intrusion detection and reporting in operation
- operational vulnerability assessments done on a monthly basis to make sure the security infrastructure is kept up to date against known vulnerabilities
- business continuity testing and strong countermeasures against threats or interruptions to the service
- incident and problem management in accordance with ITIL best practice guidance
- compliance with the government's code of connection and information assurance requirements

Land Registry used their customer service teams to develop ongoing working relationships with their customers to explain the steps taken to protect against fraud and inappropriate data-sharing. This helped to build trust and create a mechanism where customers could raise their concerns, knowing that they would be addressed. It also meant that Land Registry could take steps to educate their customers about eDRS and reducing risks of scams like phishing activities.

Land Registry knew that eDRS had the potential to revolutionise the conveyancing process and its success would affect all areas of work within Land Registry. Therefore the project team made sure that all areas of work within Land Registry knew, understood, and supported the project aims. This meant that where customers made contact with staff in Land Registry, but outside the project, they found that all staff supported eDRS and were ready to offer appropriate help to the customer.

Main lessons learnt

Transforming the way that Land Registry does business affected the way their customers

do their business.

Existing guidance to conveyancers, provided by the Council of Mortgage Lenders, required the sending of paper mortgage documents to Land Registry. It took longer than anticipated to get these instructions changed - and therefore stopping the paper documents - while the lender's legal teams carefully potential impacts.

Changing the tone of the requests, so it became more of a discussion about potential affects and the sharing legal advice or expertise as part a working party, helped to develop stronger and more direct communications.