



Black Box closes knowledge gap for Energy provider

Looking to a future that delivers critical information and knowledge across contact center ecosystems, Meridian Energy looks to Black Box to create the solution

The democratization of knowledge proposes that putting critical information into the hands of many rather than under the control of a few will drive better decision-making and customer outcomes. The notion is particularly powerful for contact centers, whose customer consultants require instant access to broad knowledge often drawn from diverse parts of an organization. Shelf, with Black Box, has put Meridian's knowledge base in the cloud, where customer consultants can access it seamlessly, improve knowledge content, and where, ultimately, the energy provider's collective knowledge will serve customers choosing to help themselves.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT (KM) SYSTEMS SHOULDN'T REQUIRE SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE

Meridian Energy's KM system, called Mavis, was as old as the name suggests. Like other legacy technology, Mavis was a complex beast, requiring programming skills and specialist knowledge to modify content and perform other basic functions.

Meridian had a full-time equivalent to fulfill the technical demands of the job. However, others less conversant with the nuances of customer contact also produced knowledge items, which didn't always gel with our customer consultants.

AT A GLANCE:

Listed energy provider Meridian selects Shelf to support its contact center operation with a modern cloud-based knowledge management system.

Client:	Meridian Energy Ltd.
Industry:	Electricity generation and retailing
Location:	Headquarters in Wellington and offices across New Zealand
Company size:	Meridian generates around 30% of the country's electricity and employs nearly 1,000 people
Challenges:	Legacy KM system was complex to the point of being unusable. It locked out consultants from content improvement, and didn't integrate with Meridian's contact center platform, Genesys Cloud
Platform:	Genesys Cloud, Contact Center Platform Shelf, Knowledge Management System

What's more, our consultants making the effort to flag improvements were often left disappointed, because the absence of built-in workflow failed to action their suggestions.

Added to these frustrations, Mavis' search function was almost unusable, requiring a specific type of language to return relevant information.

The rise of hybrid work posed further question marks. Mavis lived on the IT network rather than in the cloud, complicating access for consultants working remotely and leaving business continuity off the table.

COMPLEX CUSTOMER NEEDS RAISE THE BAR FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

Energy provision is a tough business. No one thanks you when the lights go on and everything works. But watch out the moment power goes off. When customers call, they want answers.

Meridian's approximately 100 Customer Care team support two retail brands and manage a large volume of incoming calls each week. Consultants must be ready with quick answers across a range of topics and situations – everything from new account activation, billing, faults, fire and emergencies, even account holders in volatile domestic situations.

"Customer service is more complex than it used to be," said Sandra Lawrence, Meridian's contact center manager.

"Just as banks have evolved their service to support investments and mortgages, we're doing the same thing to support more complex customer needs."

Customer consultants face additional pressure as a new generation of customers prefer to look for answers online, calling a contact center as a last resort.

"So, when customers call, they really need help, and you've got to make sure that your information and advice is really good," she said.

SHELF WINS "SHOOTOUT"

Meridian needed a KM system that worked seamlessly with its contact center platform Genesys Cloud, delivered earlier by Black Box. Lawrence and her team set their sights on two potential systems, applying a comprehensive user-centric evaluation to determine the eventual winner.

Engaging Black Box to guide the process, Lawrence likened selection to a "shootout," with a team evaluating individual functions to gauge the pros and cons of each system and demands on users. Shelf won a tight contest, largely for its development potential, Lawrence said.

MERIDIAN ENERGY

Meridian is New Zealand's largest energy generator, making power from five wind farms, seven hydro stations, and commercial solar arrays. It sells electricity through its Meridian and Powershop brands.



"New technology must be easy to use, or people won't trust it and service will suffer. Our customer consultants love using Shelf."

Sandra Lawrence, Contact Center Manager, Meridian Energy

STOP SEEKING PERFECTION

Migrating Meridian's knowledge items to Shelf highlighted the folly of perfecting content before publishing, Lawrence said.

Functions in Shelf enable administrators to grant access to customer consultants, who can lodge feedback on missing items, flag necessary changes, and even make suggested edits. "That was a big learning – you don't need everything to be perfect before publishing articles. That slows things down. Shelf makes content improvement quick and easy," she said.

Other early-stage wins include:

- Shelf's reporting monitors article usage, highlighting those popularly accessed and others deemed unhelpful, providing a steer for knowledge managers
- Integration with Genesys Cloud provides a seamless user experience, with article searches surfacing in the Genesys application
- Key word search is intuitive, returning articles that hit the mark
- Customer consultants can choose how they access knowledge, including key word search, from a list of favourites, or browsing library content accessed via the Shelf widget



Brennan Hunt, Meridian's Customer Consultant and business owner for knowledge, said trust is important when it comes to knowledge. "When consultants can see that their suggestions are reviewed, and content is being changed, they trust the information and the system."

Simplicity also has a role to play because users are naturally averse to overly complex processes. On this front, Shelf really delivers, said Hunt. "From the very beginning we didn't even need to tell our consultants about search and feedback – they just started using them. Shelf is that intuitive."

Hunt has observed a drop in consultants asking each other for assistance. "When they can find answers easily and quickly, they trust themselves to get on with the job.

Our consultants can now deal with complex queries much faster than they used to," she said.



THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

Black Box offers clients a depth of knowledge and expertise allied to specific cloud vendor environments that few individual clients can provide themselves.

Black Box helped Meridian to design and configure Shelf, integrate Shelf with Genesys Cloud, migrate content from Mavis, and appraise new features and enhancements.

"Together with Black Box and Shelf we examined new features and jointly evaluated their potential for our business,"

Lawrence said. "It worked really well. Black Box continues to support us through our journey and ensures we're heading in the right direction. They've seen what works, and what doesn't – and that's really valuable."

FUTURE MOVES

With new knowledge foundations in place, Meridian is set to evaluate AI-driven features for which Shelf is famous.

At the top of Meridian's list is automation to serve knowledge items customized to specific customer queues, which will further reduce search times for consultants.

The development draws on Shelf's AI engine, called MerlinAI, which powers Answer Assist, a feature that actively listens to customer conversations and surfaces answers drawn from knowledge content.

EARLY-STAGE WINS

- ▶ **Shelf surfaces answers within Genesys Cloud** – there's no need to switch screens
- ▶ **Reporting shows articles mostly popularly** accessed and those rarely used, providing a steer for knowledge managers
- ▶ **Key word search** is intuitive, returning articles that hit the mark
- ▶ **Customer consultants choose how they access knowledge**, including key word search, favourites, or a content library accessed via the Shelf widget
- ▶ **With its knowledge assets in the cloud**, Meridian can better support their remote customer consultants and ticks the box on business continuity

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This work was delivered by customer experience and communications technology expert Pyrios, now operating as Black Box.