A welcome partnership with Touchstone

‘It was very much a Touchstone and Welcome Break partnered achievement - each side bringing their own particular expertise into the mix.’

**Business profile**

**Welcome Break**
The second largest independent motorway service operator in the UK, with fuel, catering, retail sales and budget hotel facilities and a turnover of £500 million.

[www.welcomebreak.co.uk](http://www.welcomebreak.co.uk)

**Industry**
Hospitality and Leisure

**Challenge**
Welcome Break needed to design and implement a fully-functional, centralised finance infrastructure. The Touchstone team worked alongside Welcome Break professionals, incorporating organisational and cultural change, as well as IT system review and selection.

**Solution summary**
Touchstone provided project management support through regular consultancy and advisory sessions to develop and enhance Welcome Break’s technology strategy, systems development, software configuration, systems integration, help desk support and end user training.

**Benefits**
- Produced best fit solution that offered a high degree of scalability to meet immediate and future needs
- Leverages existing technology investments by integrating seamlessly with back-office systems
- Ensures rapid, consistent and accurate report generation - empowering business decisions

**Kelvin Astill, Finance Department, Welcome Break**

Welcome Break is the largest independent motorway service operator in the UK, with fuel, catering, retail sales and budget hotel facilities across 23 service areas. The company has demonstrated drive and innovation in modernising existing service areas and developing state of the art new sites, featuring prestigious retail brands and innovative design features. Behind this is a history of listening to customers, and understanding what matters to them when they take their travel breaks. For Welcome Break the ability to rapidly shift systems and business practices in response to their customers defines their success and profitability.

When Investcorp acquired Welcome Break from Granada in March 1997, all accounting functions were run centrally by Granada. In less than six months, Welcome Break would have to have its own separate financial operation up and running. This ambitious project needed extensive project management, together with business and technology solutions adaptable enough to accommodate rapid change and meet the requirements of the hospitality industry.

With limited financial and IT skills available in-house, it was plain that outside help was needed. IT Services Group, Touchstone, was chosen as a business partner to help Welcome Break articulate their financial strategy and to project manage and source various technologies and people. Touchstone provided a broad range of functional experience combined with 20 years of applied experience in the hospitality industry, offering comprehensive, integrated solutions. Touchstone also offered a unique approach to project management putting as much emphasis on developing relationships as on developing the best functional solutions.

Touchstone, in partnership with Welcome Break, needed to correctly identify business and technology objectives, pinpoint critical costs, activities and technology issues that support or limit their ability to become a successful and independent operation. The Touchstone and Welcome Break team worked together to provide the tools, techniques and experience needed for an integrated client solution. This involved integrating new and existing technologies such as the accountancy software, payroll and hotel reservation system with supporting technology and people.

Touchstone proposed a phased approach to the project so that progress could be tracked carefully. The first phase involved implementing a UNIX based accounting solution that was both year 2000 and Euro-compliant and able to cope with a large expansion in the number of users. The accounting operation would include up to 50 new staff, so the system needed to be powerful and robust enough to meet this planned expansion. It also needed to be simple enough...
to operate, so that with a minimal amount of training everyone should feel comfortable with the system. The second phase was to roll the fully tested product out to the various different service sites.

The Touchstone and Welcome Break team worked together to create the right high level reports to meet management requirements. Using a rich combination of coding structures and the appropriate business software, critical management information was produced to track the profitability of the different Welcome Break service providers.

After design of the accountancy software was completed, processes for data import and export together with its translation were agreed and effected. Touchstone’s proprietary product, IN2SUN was ideal for this task. Welcome Break planned links between head office and the remote sites for banking, electronic messaging, Electronic Point of Sale (EPOS), Purchase Order Processing and Electronic Data Interchange systems. Welcome Break’s EPOS strategy for sales and stock control was implemented throughout the group in conjunction with replacement of remote site IT infrastructure.

The joint project team designed and structured appropriate operational training for the new managers, assisting Welcome Break’s business transition. Touchstone introduced the tools and techniques to enable Welcome Break to adapt their accounting functions in line with expansion. The project team also worked out the different resource requirements for the newly formed finance function and the different job roles and their specification, in addition to an induction strategy. The installation of a central server and client workstations in conjunction with expansion of the internal cabling structure was considered essential to employee empowerment.

Touchstone and Welcome Break are confident that their working relationship will continue to meet the requirements of an expanding, £500m turnover business, so as to be true partners in success. The combined team approach helped achieve real business benefits through regular review meetings and careful management procedure to monitor how far Welcome Break’s requirements were being met. Touchstone, through its dedicated support centre, software maintenance, training and product user groups will continue to offer project support from the implementation stage through go-live, and well beyond.