

Case Study



Grain Connect

Broadband provider unlocks gigafast growth with Zoho One



zoho.com



The Company

Giving the UK **a better choice for broadband**

Grain Connect is a full-fibre broadband provider headquartered in Carlisle, UK. Born in 2016, this emerging "altnet" is shaking up the telecoms industry with transparent pricing, flexible contracts, and fibre optic lines designed for the future. Digging up roads and building its own independent network, Richard Fletcher, Grain's Chief Information Officer, reveals that the 200-strong team "passes on value to customers through low costs and a unique service."

With a strong commercial and residential presence across the North of England and the Midlands, this tech-forward startup is on a mission to connect communities across the entire UK. In 2021, it kicked off a £75 million investment cycle with the goal of scaling up its reach to 500,000 premises, and its customer base to 40,000 and beyond. We caught up with Richard to discover how Zoho One offered Grain all the bandwidth it needed to achieve its ambitious plans.

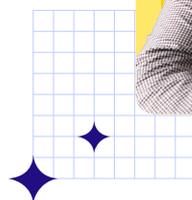
The Challenge

Disrupt the broadband market with a scalable operation



We had a set of tools
that had been stuck together
through manual processes.

Richard Fletcher,
Chief Information Officer



When Richard joined Grain in 2021, he found that its tech stack was very disjointed, featuring platforms from a variety of vendors. This included Infusionsoft CRM, Zapier, DocuSign, QuickBooks, SendGrid, PowerBI, and LastPass, amongst others. Richard was concerned by the inefficiencies and duplication this unwieldy collection created. "We would put the order in Infusionsoft, then manually create the order in GoCardless to collect the direct debits," he recalls.

Underscored by Grain's recent injection of capital, Richard knew the company's technology would need an overhaul to keep up with its growth targets. He went to the software market with an Invitation to Tender (ITT) which focused on sourcing a new, scalable CRM, but included a wish list for further connected apps. "The approach that we wanted to take with the new CRM stack was to consolidate everything into a single platform so that we had better control, with the end goal being to launch a full self-service capability."

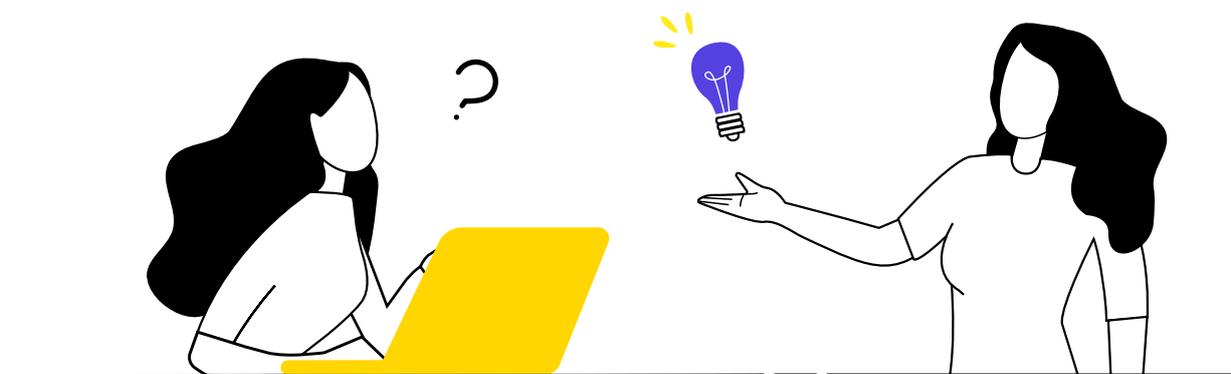
Richard's requirements:

- (i) A value-driven software solution to support Grain's low-cost operating model and competitive customer pricing.
- (i) A scalable platform to manage billing, customer support, field engineering, marketing, data insights, and administration.
- (i) Low-code tools that offered speed and agility with scope for development and customisation.
- (i) Seamless API integration with third-party applications which would remain in Grain's stack, such as AWS, GoCardless, Simpro, and Trustpilot.
- (i) A long-term implementation partner for the build, deployment, and growth journey

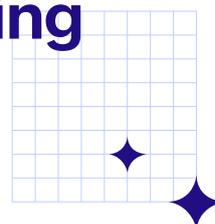
Richard engaged several well-known providers ("we went out to all the big names; Salesforce, HubSpot, etc") but found the pricing and customisation costs to be prohibitive. He also contacted a vertical solution provider, Netadmin – which is designed exclusively for the ISP market – but felt the platform was too hard-coded. By contrast, Zoho's software ticked all of his boxes, including flexibility, extensibility, and great value to boot. "The appeal for us about Zoho was that we could design exactly what we wanted," shares Richard.

The Solution

The Zoho One bundle delivers a unified platform for growth



The benefit of having everything
in one place is huge.



Richard Fletcher,
Chief Information Officer

With Richard's wish list aligning perfectly with Zoho's capabilities, Grain reached out to a UK-based Zoho partner that came highly recommended: Creative Analysis. Creative's team set about chairing process mapping workshops, migrating Grain's fragmented data, customising and implementing the CRM instance, training Grain's team, and finally, providing ongoing support.

Yet it was during the delivery of an early CRM proof of concept from Creative Analysis that Richard discovered the Zoho One collection of apps, much to his delight. "The core requirement of what we were looking for was the CRM capability. But it became fairly clear that actually, the benefit for us would be to take the Zoho

One product as a business operating model, to bundle in different products that could solve different problems the business had," explains Richard.

By onboarding the Zoho One suite, Richard is now empowered to manage groups and user permissions from a central admin panel, enrol new employees, and deploy new Zoho applications in a few clicks without incurring additional costs. And since transitioning to the bundle, Grain has been able to save money against several third-party subscriptions, including LastPass (replaced by Zoho Vault), and DocuSign (replaced by Zoho Sign). Richard also values Zoho's Deluge coding script, which is employed across every Zoho application in the suite. "Syntactically, it's not difficult to learn, and it's been really helpful to have that common language across the platform. It really helps us from a consistency point of view," he adds.

Grain now actively uses Zoho CRM, SalesIQ, Forms, Sign, Desk, Pagesense, Analytics, DataPrep, Campaigns, and Vault to manage its internal and external facing operations. Let's dive into the apps which most dial-up Grain's growth!

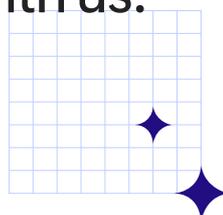
Zoho CRM

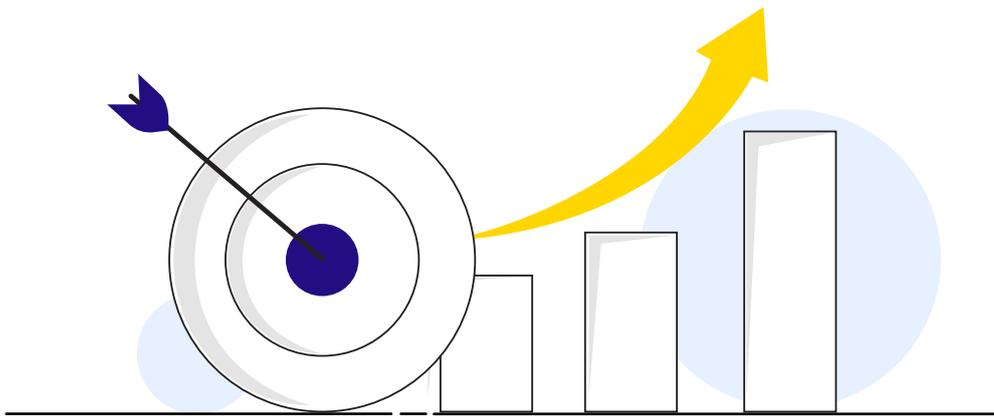
Premises, payments, sales, switching, and surveys...



We needed a good CRM
that was going to scale with us.

Richard Fletcher,
Chief Information Officer





Premises

Because Grain owns its infrastructure, which is still expanding at superfast speeds, its team needs to have full visibility of its premises and their statuses. "One of the big challenges in the ISP industry is understanding how your assets are managed," explains Richard. To achieve this, Creative built a series of interlinked custom modules in Zoho CRM to map out the asset structure. Now its 'Premises' (defined zones at street level), sit within its 'Projects' (a group of no more than 1,500 homes), which sit within 'Build Regions' (such as Hartlepool). At a glance, Grain's CRM users can see whether a specific premises is in planning, if site works have commenced, if it's active, or whether bidding is still ongoing. "We'll know whether or not the network has gone live, what network has been deployed into that site, and what speeds they're capable of," explains Richard.

All of Grain's asset information is also pushed via a web API into its website, which hosts a dynamic postcode checker for customers. Using this tool, visitors can see whether Grain's network is available in their area or if it's coming soon. This connection between CRM and website offers a slick way for Grain to reach new customers without manual effort. "If a new premise gets passed on a day, it will go for sale the following evening on the website," Richard adds.

Once a premise is live and local customers sign up, Grain's field engineering team uses Zoho CRM to book and manage the router installation job, sending out email notifications and appointment reminders. And although Grain's technicians use a third-party FSM platform called Simpro whilst on site, the completed job reports push seamlessly back into the customer's Zoho CRM record. This triggers the new router to be automatically activated and a new billing cycle to be generated.



Payments

Billing is also orchestrated from Zoho CRM. "We built a series of custom modules alongside the invoicing capability that the CRM already had to manage our subscription billing process," reveals Richard. "A bill run happens every night, and that feeds into GoCardless or Stripe to take the payments. When a payment comes back, that gets integrated into Zoho CRM so we know the balance on the account." Impressively, Zoho CRM handles around 50,000 transactions per month for Grain, including invoices, payments, and credits.



Sales

Zoho CRM operates within Grain's three-pronged sales approach. Firstly, it collates new opportunities pulled from Grain's website via the Zoho SalesIQ live chat facility, as well as enquiry form completions pulled from Zoho Forms. In tandem, Grain's field sales team uses Zoho CRM whilst pounding the pavements in newly connected neighbourhoods, logging expressions of interest and placing orders in a connected mobile app as they knock on doors and spread awareness. Finally, Grain's office-based desk sales team uses Zoho CRM to action and record inbound and outbound sales calls. "We have a custom widget that takes them through the sales process via a blueprint where they can select products and apply discount codes...it helps them get the proposition right to the consumer," shares Richard.

As for renewals, Zoho CRM makes the process seamless, too. "It will automatically offer them a digital renewal via email on 60 days, 40 days, and 20 days before their contract's due to renew to give them a new offer," adds Richard.

Switching

A key consideration for any broadband provider is its end-of-contract experience. To alleviate a frustrating process marred by multiple phone calls, endless counter-offers, and overlapping bill cycles, OFCOM introduced the "One Touch Switching" regulation in 2024. "It was a real fundamental change to the industry because it meant we had to communicate with other operators," explains Richard. As soon as Grain receives a new instruction from a customer, they are obliged to work with the incumbent provider to handle the switch, including the notification of any exit fees, contract terminations, and installation dates, to prevent any overlap.

To navigate the One Touch Switching regulation, Grain mapped each step of the process inside Zoho CRM. "All of that process has now been orchestrated using a custom widget that the sales team uses," says Richard. The widget guides the team through the entire switching process and is pre-populated with scripts that need to be read to the customer, plus drop-down lists of alternative broadband providers. The widget is also synced with a One Touch Switching tool on Grain's website where customers can find and match up their contracts to kick-start the process.



Surveys

Grain also uses Zoho CRM to capture critical customer feedback that informs its growth journey. "Being able to understand the trends around the service we deliver is really important to us," affirms Richard. Once a month, an NPS survey is emailed out from the CRM to small groups of randomly selected customers to gain visibility of overall customer satisfaction. These results are logged in a custom CRM module.

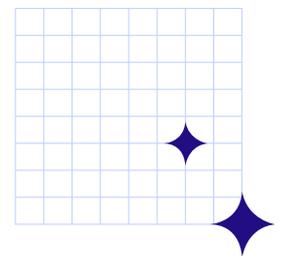
Additionally, Grain uses Trustpilot ("it establishes trust, particularly as we're a new provider coming into the market") to invite customer comments. Richard integrated the Trustpilot platform directly with Zoho CRM via a web API, enabling him to monitor and report on the responses, which are housed in a further custom CRM module.

Zoho Desk

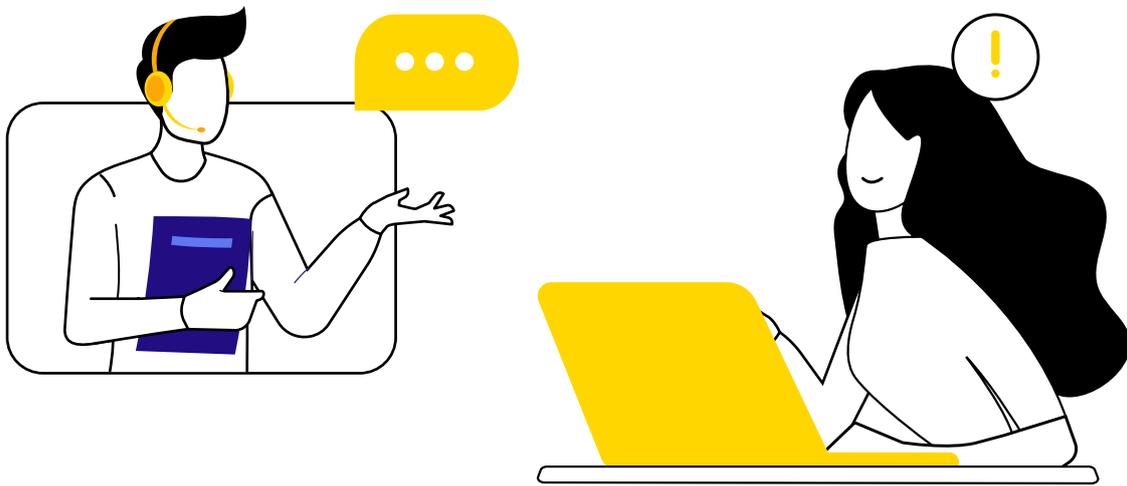
Internal and external ticket management...



Moving from shared inboxes to Zoho Desk gave us clarity.



Richard Fletcher,
Chief Information Officer



Broadband is a critical aspect of modern life, and Grain understands that access to fast, professional support is non-negotiable for its customers. To this end, the customer support team employs Zoho Desk to manage inbound customer requests. "Customers email us about a variety of different topics, from billing queries, faults, technical support, and sales advice. All of those go into separate departments in Zoho Desk, and we have knowledge guides which help agents respond," reveals Richard. "Typically we process 9,000 customer interactions per month." All customer Desk tickets are then pushed into the corresponding record in Zoho CRM, giving Grain's sales team complete visibility of a customer's interactions.

Grain also uses Zoho Desk to manage internal queries and processes, with ten different teams proactively using the platform. "Our purchasing teams use Desk to manage all of their requests in and out, as does the finance team for accounts receivable and accounts payable," explains Richard. Blueprints in the back end of Desk help assign tickets to the most appropriate team members based on the supplier it relates to, or the type of payment query.

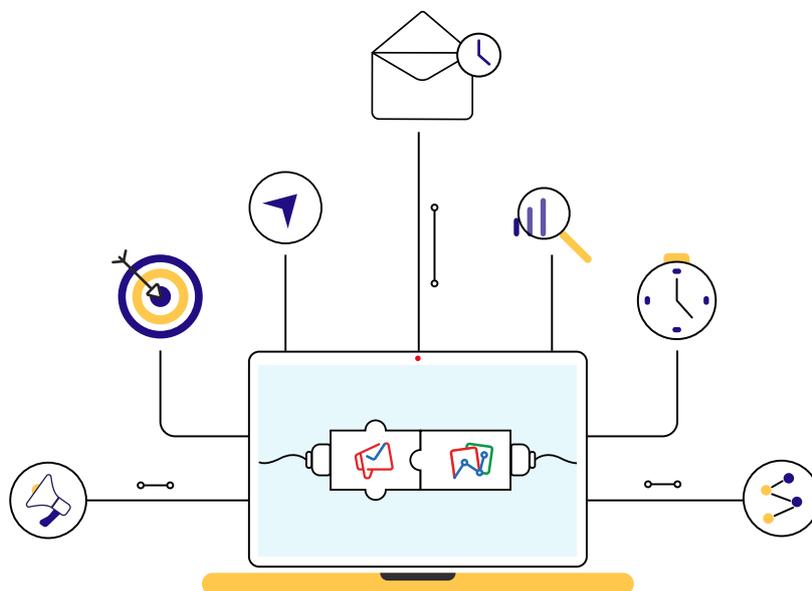
Desk offers Grain's internal departments greater control, clarity, and collaboration potential than ever before. "One of the reasons our teams moved to Desk was because they had been using shared inboxes to deal with requests. They'd been using flags and colours, all that normal stuff to try and manage the load," recalls Richard. Using Desk, Grain's users can easily assign tickets to themselves or others, providing complete transparency on who is dealing with what.

Zoho Campaigns and Pagesense

Megabyte Marketing...

One of the challenges Grain has long encountered in its marketing efforts is how to personalise communications to homeowners based on the connectivity status of a premise. By connecting Zoho CRM to Zoho Campaigns, Grain's marketing team can sync the premise data into its email templates and contextualise the campaigns. "We have a custom segmentation module that we push into Campaigns that summarises what the status of a premise is, so we can target the message at the right point," reveals Richard. What's more, if the status of a premise changes to 'live' in Zoho CRM, this triggers a workflow which sends an automated email and an SMS to marketing leads to let them know they can sign up.

Grain's marketing team also deployed Zoho Pagesense to test and refine its website content. Using its heatmap functionality, the team can understand which areas of the site successfully convert visitors, and which segments pose stumbling blocks or have poor interaction. "If a new offer has gone live and we've changed some of the creative, it helps us understand how well it's worked and how it's affecting our conversion," says Richard.



Looking to the future

From the outset of Grain's growth project, Richard sought a long-term software solution that would scale in line with the business. He also wanted a secure, long-lasting relationship with an implementation partner that could support his teams long after the initial build. With Zoho and Creative Analysis, Richard has laid the groundwork for a successful future, enabling Grain to grow, remain compliant, improve customer satisfaction, and more. "I'd definitely recommend Zoho, we've had a great experience with the product...and we'd definitely work with Creative again too, and we will continue our relationship with them," beams Richard.

Richard has even more exciting Zoho plans in store:

- (🔗) Open a portal in Zoho Desk so customers can view their ticket history.
- (🔗) Explore Zoho's instant messaging capabilities with WhatsApp integrations.
- (🔗) Trial Zoho Assist to enable remote router configurations.
- (🔗) Onboard Zoho Contracts to manage legal documents.
- (🔗) Introduce Zoho Learn to smooth out the employee onboarding process.

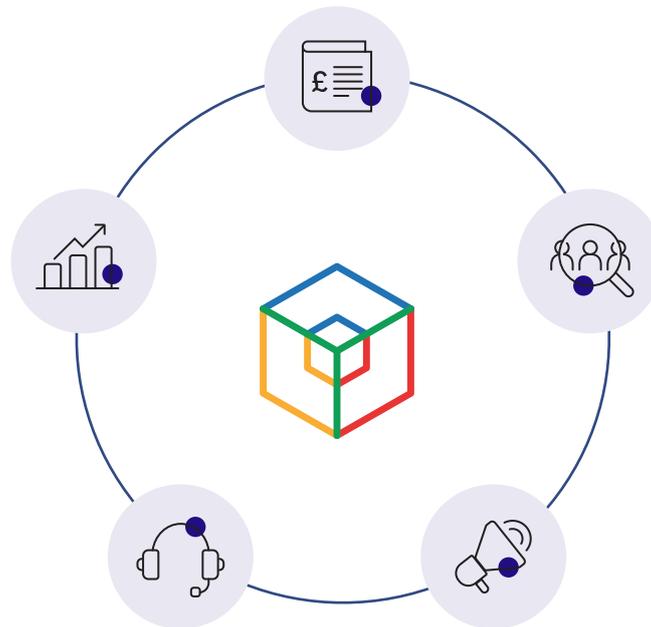
About Creative Analysis



As a certified Zoho Partner based in the UK, Creative Analysis specialises in the implementation of expert solutions to streamline any business, reduce costs, and free up time through software. With a deep focus on process mapping, Creative Analysis seeks to understand the end-to-end requirements of all departments in an organisation and determine the architecture that's needed to deliver transformational results. Creative Analysis also provides bespoke Zoho training and a range of aftercare services including a named contact and priority support.

To learn more about Creative Analysis, visit: <https://www.creativeanalysis.co.uk/>

About Zoho One



Developed as the ultimate "operating system for business", the Zoho One bundle is a collection of 45+ integrated applications that cater to every diverse need of a modern business. From Sales to Marketing, Customer Support, HR, Operations, Finance, and Legal, Zoho One's powerful suite of tools can be relied upon by every department to improve performance, enhance collaboration, and streamline processes. An unrivalled yet affordable solution, Zoho One's cloud-based apps bring extraordinary value to any organisation.

Please find out more via our website: <https://www.zoho.com/one/>



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