Overview
British Gas Housing Services Group, a subsidiary of Centrica, is a leading provider of energy-related installation, breakdown, and service cover packages for over 3.5 million customers. British Gas has recently been awarded a contract to manage the service and repair of 10,500 Islington Council properties managed by social housing provider Homes for Islington (HFI). All gas appliances need to be serviced and certified annually, and tenant-reported breakdowns responded to within contractual obligation.

When it became clear that existing manual processes could no longer keep up with growing service requests, British Gas turned to Extra! X-treme for a more modern approach.

Challenge
The legacy system British Gas had in place to manage tenant visits was complex and time-consuming. Appointments were passed from HFI to British Gas electronically every 15 minutes and placed on an FTP site before being copied to a file server for processing. This process involved pasting data into an Excel spreadsheet, where a macro was embedded to transfer the content and key fields into an easily readable document. The document was subsequently printed out and the data entered manually into the British Gas Work Management Information System (WMIS), which issued details about the jobs to engineers.

Using this process, British Gas employees could not keep up with burgeoning requests. The company needed to modernize the system so it would be faster and easier to use.

Solution
After careful evaluation, the British Gas team chose our company to streamline its appointment-management process. Our company has a proven track record of working with other departments within the company, so the decision was straightforward, according to Rob Heis, Business Support Manager at British Gas Housing Services Group, who facilitated the project.

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ROB HEIS
Business Support Manager
British Gas Housing Services Group

At a Glance
- Industry: Energy
- Location: United Kingdom

Challenge
The manual appointment-management process was complicated, time-consuming, and unable to keep up with growing customer demands.

Solution
Use Extra! X-treme to strengthen host-access security, enhance user productivity, and provide seamless integration with other technologies.

Results
- Increased employee productivity.
- Reduced man hours by eliminating duplication.
- Improved response times for customer appointments.
- Enhanced customer and employee satisfaction.
“The Attachmate (now part of Micro Focus) team identified our requirements early on and were extremely responsive to our needs,” said Heis. “As the project evolved, we realized there were other features we would like the new system to incorporate—and Attachmate (now part of Micro Focus) took these changes in their stride.”

The solution was Extra! X-treme terminal emulation software. With Extra!, applications were produced using Visual Basic and Extra! Basic. The initial deployment had a tight deadline and British Gas required the solution to be live in two months, a target we successfully met.

Now the files created by HFI are picked up automatically from the file server and the work request details are entered automatically into WMIS. Call center agents search for the property and enter jobs into the WMIS through two GUI screens. Extra! X-treme uses the in-built macro language and allows interaction with the VT-based WMIS system. Planners have a consistent method of job creation, as jobs entered by call center agents aren’t directly created in WMIS. Instead, a macro (WMIS-HUB) takes all jobs (XML feeds) and makes multiple checks against WMIS to ensure there are no duplicates created.

This solution ensures that information is received, formatted, and communicated to the engineers faster, to minimize human error and manage duplication. Previously, requests by tenants to change an appointment date could legitimately generate multiple job references within HFI’s system. However, this could lead to additional jobs being raised in the British Gas work management system—potentially creating two separate appointments, with two separate engineer visits. The new application prevented further duplications.

High priority jobs are also managed using the Extra! X-treme application, with precedence given to old age pensioners, vulnerable people, and those with young children or babies. These priority reports include reports of gas leaks, and recognition of customers who have previously lodged complaints, to provide additional customer intelligence.

### Results

We developed a front-end application that allowed all Housing Services call center staff to enter jobs, rather than only specified departments. This has significantly simplified the process, leading to considerable improvements in response times and customer satisfaction.

The original target of reducing the time spent entering data was successfully achieved, with British Gas saving the equivalent of 1.5 full-time workers over the first 12 months. In addition to improving productivity, the system raised both employee and customer satisfaction, as staff are now able to spend more time managing the customers—rather than inputting data.

In the future, British Gas Housing Services Group believes that our solutions will be able to deliver similar benefits for other contracts. “This technology has enabled us to speed up response times to jobs, reduce man hours, and increase the value we gain from our existing systems,” said Heis. “We believe that British Gas Housing Services Group will continue to benefit from the use of Attachmate (now part of Micro Focus) solutions for a long time across the business.”