

Cellnet Telecommunications Group – improving customer care and reducing costs with IP Telephony



Background

Founded in 1992, Cellnet Telecommunications Group is a leading wholesale distributor of telecommunications and IT products in both Australia and New Zealand. The Group distributes a total range of mobile phones and accessories from Alcatel, Ericsson, Hyundai, L.G., Motorola, Mitsubishi, NEC, Nokia, Panasonic, Philips, Kyocera, Sagem, Siemens and Sony.

Through IT Wholesale, a wholly owned subsidiary of Cellnet, the company also distributes a wide range of computer hardware and peripherals from IBM, Acer, Lexmark, Kyocera, Epson, Brother, Panasonic, OKI, Canon and Sony, as well as handheld PCs, PDAs, data boxes and accessories.

Headquartered in Brisbane, Cellnet Telecommunications Group has approximately 230 employees with offices in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Auckland which provide 24-hour delivery, sales and service to any Australian or New Zealand destination.

Challenge

The success of the group hinges upon its internal organisational structure; a team based approach to providing superior customer service, and management's commitment to information technology as a means of responding to customers' requirements .

This commitment to finding a smart IT solution to solve their problems helped them address one of the key issues facing the Group in 2001 – their customer interface.

Erik Waegeman, Chief Information Officer, comments: "Last year we recognised that there was an urgent need for us to install a customer call centre. Our customer relationships are critical to the success of our business. We liaise with resellers who purchase large volumes of IT and telecommunications equipment from us on a regular basis and so it is vital that we make it easy for them to do so.

"With a standard PABX phone system we had no way of measuring how we were performing for our customers. For example, we did not know how many calls we received, how long customers had to wait in line to speak to one of our staff, how long we spent talking to customers, how many abandoned calls we had or even if our switchboard was capable of handling the load.

"We also wanted to significantly improve our customer service levels by being able to immediately see the case history of any customer so that we could track their enquiries and understand their requirements more fully."

In addition to these requirements, Waegeman realised that he needed a scalable solution. The Cellnet Telecommunications Group is a fast-growing corporation. Therefore he knew that the call centre needed to be set up in such a way that it could easily be expanded to add new sites and fully integrated with the existing IT infrastructure.

The network consists of 12 servers located at the company's headquarters in Brisbane and approximately 150 PCs located in Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney, Adelaide and Auckland. In conjunction with this, the group had six PABX systems, one in each location.

To better understand which solutions would help the Cellnet Telecommunications Group meet its business goals, Waegeman investigated the migration from PABX to an IP Telephony solution.

“This immediately made sense,” he comments. “From just being able to handle phone calls using a PABX phone system, IP Telephony opens up a converged network environment. With a single IP network for all our voice, video and data traffic, we would have a solid foundation for rolling out a wide range of applications to improve customer care.”

Solution

In September 2001 the first phase of the call centre was installed. The PABX systems in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne were replaced with Cisco's AVVID (Architecture for Voice, Video and Integrated Data).

A Cisco Catalyst 6500 switch was used as the network core with seven Cisco 3524 powered switches in Brisbane and one each in Sydney and Melbourne. These powered switches are required for the 170 Cisco 7940 IP phones.

Cisco 3640 routers were used to enable the three sites to communicate with each other and the PSTN network

The Cisco Call Manager software runs under Windows 2000® on an IBM @server xSeries 330, which performs the IP telephony services. In conjunction, Performance Solutions Limited (PSL) Vision software suite provides operator and call centre functionality.

Calls come in to three operators at CellNet, who are able to process them in under 15 seconds using PSL *Vision Console*. This software runs under Microsoft Windows® and enables operators to see on their computer screens the individual phone status, user locations, their availability/return time, in addition to any specific instructions to the operator, such as, “If John Doe calls, interrupt me in meeting room 2”. This means they can distribute calls quickly and efficiently throughout the organisation and through to the Call Centre. When customers are transferred to the call centre, their calls are distributed to first available or most appropriate person. If a caller is waiting, a queuing mechanism plays courtesy announcements and continue options.

Employees have *Vision Manager*, an agent version of the PSL software on their desktops which enables them to notify the operators or the system (for Contact Centre agents), via a menu of 'reasons', whether they are available or not for calls.

In addition, a real-time directory displays, all users within CellNet's offices can see availability information and if any staff member is on the phone or not. Queue status and details are also viewed from *Vision Manager* enabling call centre management to see exactly how many calls are currently waiting, the detail of each call, how many agents are available to answer calls and real-time statistics including calls answered and abandoned.

The system was integrated with Cellnet Telecommunications Group's Enterprise Resources Planning (ERP) software, *Movex* with immediate benefits for the call centre staff.

Waegeman explains: “As they handle a call, staff can review a customer's past transactions, check on the status of current ones, see if an order has been faxed or if it is still in a queue, as well as accessing technical and financial information regarding the models, components and accessories we wholesale.”

Following the success of the integration of the telecommunications customer support, next month will see the integration of the IT wholesale system into the converged IP Tel network. All company products will then be supported from the one central customer call centre, which employs approximately 30 staff handling around 2000 calls per day.

“At this point,” comments Waegeman, “we will really start to reap the benefits of total integration. With just one call centre, management is far simpler across the company and far more cost-effective. Supervisors are able to see the status of every customer transaction, assess the queues and jump in to assist as and when needed.”

By the end of the year, the remaining PABX systems in Adelaide, Perth and Auckland will be replaced and those offices fully integrated into the company-wide IP Tel converged network.

“This will provide a consistent customer experience for everyone – regardless of whether they are situated in outback WA or downtown Auckland, they will receive the same five-star, efficient, courteous treatment,” says Waegeman.

And that's just the beginning. With a converged IP environment in place, Waegeman plans to implement many more innovations to improve customer care.

“Right now we are developing a solution that will enable customers to click on a link button from our website that enables them to talk live with an operator. The next step is to be able to push html pages to them as they speak to provide answers to their queries or to open pdf files that they can download and/or print.”



Results

For the Cellnet Telecommunications Group, the key benefit from their IP Telephony solution is improved customer satisfaction.

“We knew that professionalism and better service would drive our competitive advantage,” reflects Waegeman, “because once we have customer satisfaction, we automatically get improved Transaction Completion Rates (TCRs) and as a result, increased revenue.”

Not only are we handling our calls better, we are also handling them more efficiently from one central location. We’ve managed to achieve a 95% and above service level which meets the industry-standard benchmark.

“As a result of the centralisation and consolidation, our management overhead is significantly reduced. We’ve also been able to allocate human resources more efficiently.”

Another benefit of the converged data networks is the cost saving on company communications. “With a data network we have toll by-pass, so internal calls are free of charge within our six sites,” Waegeman explains.

IT support costs have also been reduced considerably. “My IT staff understand the entire IP Telephony system, so we can maintain the network easily ourselves using basic html code. This is quite a step up from the old PABX system, which required a lot of expensive support and resources.”

The benefits of IP Tel really come in to play when it comes to integrating more sites.

“With the old PABX system it was very hard to link sites because most PABX systems are incompatible with each other, making integrating new acquisitions very costly. You also had to be on site to program the phones.

“With an IP Telephony network, it’s simply a question of adding a Cisco router and IP phones and then linking them via our frame relay network,” comments Waegeman. “ I can actually program all the phones, regardless of location, from my desk in Brisbane and even put XML pages on phones so that staff can view service directories, stock and weather information, etc.”

Partnerships

IP Telephony is leading-edge technology and therefore it’s essential to work with a comprehensive architectural plan and reliable partners. Working with Cisco, IBM and PSL, CellNet Communications Group was able to achieve their goals in a timely, efficient manner.

“When we were first contacted and asked to tender a solution, we were competing against traditional PABX suppliers,” comments Chris Holden, Project Manager, Networking & Connectivity Services, IBM Australia.

“Our first step was to sit down with CellNet to carefully analyse their needs. Having done this, there was no doubt that an IP Telephony solution would meet their short and long-term goals far more effectively. It offers an easier and more cost-efficient path for growth, cost savings on interstate calls and more cost-effective management options.”

“We then prepared extensive documentation and an implementation strategy which we presented and modified in consultation with them. CellNet was able to leverage our knowledge of Cisco products and professional expertise to achieve the required solution. Although this is very new technology, the IBM and Cisco solution is proven and we have the experience to deliver.”

Waegmann comments, “Cisco not only understands the network, they’re also the furthest ahead with IP telephony technology and they have superior solutions. IBM understands how to take applications like voice through the network and have been committed to helping us be successful from ‘proof of concept’ through to implementation.”

Justin Martin, General Manager - Technical, at PSL, the company which implemented the software solution, comments: “After in-depth consultation with CellNet, we designed a complete directory, operator and Contact Centre solution that addressed their objective of providing a customer service environment that is second to none.

“By implementing our *Vision* suite with Cisco AVVID telephony, we enabled CellNet to create a single, managed Contact Centre and communications environment which provides visibility and control across the entire enterprise. In particular, the high level reporting of service levels has empowered CellNet management with the real data they need to evaluate and manage their communications environment.”

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