

The Anglican Diocese of Sydney reaps significant ROI with IP Telephony



Background

The Diocese of Sydney is the largest of the 23 dioceses that make up the Anglican Church of Australia. Most reverend Peter Jenson, Archbishop of Sydney, is assisted by a team of five assistant bishops and the Dean of the cathedral. They are responsible for some 263 parishes and provisional parishes, staffed by clergy, as well as licensed chaplains who operate in hospitals, institutions, schools and universities.

Altogether, the Sydney Diocese employs approximately 650 people located from Palm Beach in the north, through the Blue Mountains as far as Lithgow in the west and down to Ulladulla in the south. The entire diocese is managed by the Sydney Diocesan Secretariat, comprising some 180 administrative staff located on three floors in St Andrews House, Sydney Square.

Challenge

In October 2001, Hamish Maple, Network Administrator at the Sydney Diocesan Secretariat, reviewed their use of existing PABX systems, which were proving expensive to maintain and upgrade. He was also looking for voicemail functionality.

Maple explains: "Three different PABX systems were in place and they were not integrated, meaning that inter-office calls were actually costing us money. Two PABXs were older key systems lacking the functionality and the call features we required. For example, we were unable to integrate them with voicemail systems or with different communication providers because essential parts were never produced. We were also out of capacity on the system with no room for growth and I had concerns regarding the age of the equipment and the cost of replacement parts for old technology.

"On top of that, the maintenance of the system was a cause of concern. Everything was administered externally and so each change had to be carried out by a contractor or PABX vendor, which was time-consuming and expensive.

"For example, it was costing up to \$200 every time a staff member relocated office for the engineer to re-program the PABX systems and the cable contractor to install the new connection. On top of that, it usually took up to two days to happen.

"Initially we approached PABX vendors to see what solutions they could offer us using a traditional phone network. However, our findings were that they could offer no more than an extension of what we already had. What's more, they still had proprietary equipment with exorbitant maintenance fees when we were really looking for a lot more flexibility."

In his quest for a replacement system, Maple attended an independent IP Telephony seminar, which introduced him to a roadmap for the future of communications. He comments:

"It became pretty self-evident during the course of my research that PABX was on its way out and IP Telephony would become the industry standard. The market take-up is accelerating quite rapidly as products mature and standards become ratified.

"I also approached Cisco directly and asked about their new Architecture for Voice Video and Integrated Data (AVVID). And as a result of my investigation, we decided to implement a staged roll-out of an IP Telephony solution, starting in October 2000. This gave us time to upgrade our network in preparation for an IP Telephony pilot trial in March 2001."

Solution

The network upgrade was carried out from October 2000 – March 2001. It consists of 30 servers and approximately 200 desktop computers on a Local Area Network.

Older network shared components, such as hubs, were removed and they installed the latest generation Cisco Catalyst 3524 and 4006 switches, which support the AVVID architecture and have the inline power which is required for IP Telephones. They also installed two Cisco 3660 routers for gateway functionality.

The next step was the trial. Thirty Cisco 7960 and 7940 IP telephones were trialled by selected personnel, including a range of key management and secretarial staff for a two-month evaluation period.

Maple comments. “The pilot went very well; the system was easy to use and provided the voice communications staff required. Based on their positive feedback, we went ahead with full roll-out of 200 Cisco IP Tel phones across the organisation.

“We allowed for a one-month overlap during which the AVVID system and the older PABX system were both in place, allowing staff time to adapt to the new technology. After that time, we offered to train those who required it. About 30 staff members took up this offer. The rest were already confident in the use of the system.”

The staff enjoy the use of the large phone display, which can display xml pages and which provides information on calls, such as call duration, caller ID and call waiting. The IP Tel phones also offer all the usual options, such as speed dialling and conference calls.

“We’ve also developed an interface into Lotus Notes that lets staff query their address book, do a search and dial any number, direct just by pressing a button,” comments Maple.

Cisco Unity is used for voice mail. It’s a powerful communications server that provides advanced, convergence-based services-such as voicemail and unified messaging-and integrates them with common desktop applications.

With the upcoming release of Cisco Unity with support for Lotus Notes, the staff will be able to take advantage of Unified Messaging. This will enable them to listen to e-mail over the telephone, check voice messages from the Internet, and (when integrated with a supported third-party fax server) forward faxes, wherever they may be.

Results

According to Maple, the Return On Investment (ROI) benefits have been immediate. The cost of relocating phones is down from as much as \$200 to zero. “We estimate that we are saving approximately \$2,000 per month on phone relocations,” he said.

“When staff move, they pick up a phone, plug it in when they arrive at their new desk and they’re configured on the network ready to take calls and check their voice mails with no intervention from me.

“The flexibility is superb,” said Maple. “People can move desks, as and when required and be productive far more quickly. From an administration perspective, it has saved us hours and made it really easy to direct call flows.”

An additional benefit has been the increased productivity for staff. Under the old PABX system, staff had to wait two days or more to have a new phone installed. It can now be achieved in 15 minutes.

Because there is only one cable to install for everything instead of two (one for phones, one for data), the diocese has also halved its infrastructure costs. “We estimate that we have saved around \$15,000 to date on cabling,” said Maple.

As well as the easier administration of the phone system, the IP Tel network has brought many other advantages. It is far more efficient and reliable network to maintain because it is a redundant system with built-in failsafe mechanisms. It also offers higher bandwidth to users, leading to great network efficiencies

Partnerships

A comprehensive architectural plan and solid deployment partnerships are central to a successful IP Telephony rollout. With Cisco AVVID and the expertise of Cisco Certified Partner, Logical, the Sydney Diocese has both.

Maple comments. “Logical took a lot of time and endeavoured to find out exactly what we wanted. They not only presented what they thought was the best option, but gave us choices with regard to the system, enabling us to make a well-informed decision that we were comfortable with.

“The whole project was well-managed. The staff at Logical are good communicators and made it easy for us to achieve our objectives.”

Adrian Brand, the Network Consultant at Logical who managed the installation, comments: “Cisco are the furthest ahead with IP Telephony technology and they are able to offer an enterprise solution that’s fully integrated with excellent support levels.

“It’s a pleasure to be able to install a technology solution that makes such a difference to ROI and which makes life easier for network administrators. Cisco’s AVVID has so many advantages by being so cost-effective and easy for customers to manage, maintain and scale. It is clearly the way forward.”



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