



Canadian airport reaps the benefits of truly unified communications

Technology leaders at Halifax International Airport Authority (HIAA), one of Canada's largest airports, were facing a unique challenge. The airport terminal had just been expanded, part of a \$90 million project to accommodate growth and increase common space by 40 percent. The massive project required a reexamination of the entire business, including structural, operational and technological components.

In discussing a much-needed technology upgrade, an innovative usage model was proposed. HIAA leaders wanted the infrastructure and technology team to create a "common-use methodology" that would enable different airlines to share the same equipment.

"The idea was to create more flexibility and efficiency for how terminal space is utilized," explains David Power, Enterprise Account Manager at HP. "Traditionally, airlines are given a certain number of gates and service desks within a terminal. When the airline isn't using that space, it sits idle. HIAA wanted

to maximize its space and create a scenario where one airline could use a gate for a flight, and then have a different airline use the gate immediately thereafter."

Among other upgrades, the project called for a unified communications (UC) solution. UC solutions enable individuals and groups to connect, communicate and collaborate across networks, platforms and devices. Many view UC purely as a means for integrating disparate devices, such as cell phones and laptops. While device integration is certainly a fundamental aspect of UC, Power is quick to point out that this line of thinking is what inhibits organizations from realizing the true potential of UC technologies.

"UC is a hot buzzword and many vendors are using it to promote their specific products and capabilities," Power suggests. "But true UC has very little to do with features or functionality. It's all about enabling business productivity and improving the way various people and groups work together."

He explains that business priorities, communication objectives and the existing technology environment should guide any UC deployment, not the products being purchased or the capabilities they bring to the table. HIAA provides a fitting example. Before considering particular solutions, they settled on an overarching objective: provide a fully redundant, zero downtime infrastructure that can support voice, video and several mission-critical airline applications.

HIAA eventually sought the services of HP and Cisco, who worked in tandem to meet the objective. The two companies developed and integrated a UC solution that includes wireless and IP telephony, HP servers and Cisco networking equipment.

"Halifax International Airport Authority depends on a stable and secure infrastructure in order to service airlines from across the globe," says Michael Healy, Vice-President of Infrastructure and Technology for HIAA. "Our unified communications solution brought to us by HP and Cisco resulted in a seamless migration to an advanced network that integrates voice, video, data and wireless communications into a single airport-wide communications system. [The solution] enables us to manage risks and achieve better ROI. And now we are known in the industry for our quality service."

Today, each airline has its own network at the Halifax Airport that can be accessed through a common portal. Airline employees log in using touch screen monitors located in terminal gates and service desks to securely access their data. VoIP phones at each gate and service desk are also customized per user with the particular airline's phone choices. Once an airline employee is logged in, that airline's data, rules and policies are applied regardless of the device being used or the location within the terminal.

"None of this was in place," Healy told SearchUnifiedCommunications.com last October. "We needed a strong integrator to come in and put together the backbone. We sought advice on how best we could configure this. This required a lot more technology than the number of people we had on the ground."*

Power indicates that HP and Cisco broached the challenge with business questions, not product pitches. As a result, HIAA expects full ROI in just over two years and \$15 million in savings by eliminating space requirements. Also, the airport now has a UC infrastructure in place that can be enhanced over time in accordance with business priorities and communication needs.

"We're not adding more equipment," Healy said to SearchUnifiedCommunications.com, "but better utilizing what we have."

* "Unified Communications New Priority for HP," SearchUnifiedCommunications.com.

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