

# Cisco brings telecommuting to eleven-strong small business

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
<b>CUSTOMER NAME</b> · Flexible Steel Lacing Company Ltd
<b>LOCATION</b> · Bradford, UK
<b>INDUSTRY</b> · Manufacturing
<b>COMPANY SIZE</b> · 11 employees
<b>BUSINESS CHALLENGE</b> · Enable key staff to remain with the company following relocation · Reduce impact and disruption of business changing from manufacturing to distribution-only · Maintain effective communication for a mobile, flexi-time work force
<b>SOLUTION</b> · Cisco Unified Communications system scalable for an eleven-employee small business
<b>BUSINESS RESULTS</b> · Retain key administration staff despite a 50 mile relocation · Home working has no impact on business operation or communication · Reduces reliance on and cost of mobile telephony · Enables a seamless transition for a relocation and a significant change in business activity · Will support business expansion without additional employees

**Cisco Unified Communications system enables key administration staff to spend up to 50 percent of time working at home.**

## Business Challenge

When Flexible Steel closed down its manufacturing operation in Glossop, Derbyshire, to concentrate on distribution, and relocated to a modern site in Bradford 50 miles away, it wanted to ensure some of its key staff stayed with the company. Flexible Steel is the UK arm of Flexco, a US company founded in 1907 and a manufacturer of parts for conveyor belts. Flexible Steel is now responsible for distributing Flexco parts to customers such as Heathrow for moving walk ways and coal-fired power stations that use conveyor belts to move coal within furnaces. Today, Flexible Steel has just eleven staff managing its UK and Ireland distribution business – a sales force of five, four administration staff, a warehouse manager and the managing director, Matthew Mayers.

The move to Bradford presented a problem for Flexible Steel and in particular for the company’s four key administration staff. They had been with the company for several years and were seen as critical to running the business, but they were now 50 miles from their place of work with a two-hour commute along some of the UK’s busiest and most congested roads.

Mayers, who had recently joined Flexible Steel from the Australian subsidiary to oversee the change from manufacturing to distribution, was keen for staff to have a good balance between work and personal life. He did not want to ask staff to relocate their home, but neither

did he want to lose key people. Mayers believed that technology and in particular, Cisco Unified Communications, could provide the solution.

## Network Solution

Despite being a small sized business, when Flexible Steel moved to its new Bradford site it deployed a Cisco Unified Communications system. This comprises a Local Area Network (LAN) around the Bradford site and Virtual Private Network connections over ADSL into the homes of eight staff – the four administration staff and the sales force. There are 10 Cisco Unified IP telephones in the office and at staff homes, along with two wireless Cisco Unified IP handsets.



The Cisco LAN supports a Cisco wireless network which enables staff to use laptops anywhere on site especially for sales staff that drop into Bradford. But it also lets the warehouse manager use a wireless handset while he moves around the warehouse managing incoming stock and outgoing part consignments to customers. The solution is an example of Cisco's Smart Business Solutions which are designed to help small businesses use technology in the most efficient and cost effective way.

The Cisco Unified Communications system was implemented by Cisco Premier Certified Partner, JMC.IT. JMC's role involved the solution design and the entire relocation of all IT systems to the new Bradford site. JMC also developed a browser application which is especially useful for remote



working. It allows users to see, in real time, the status of all other users whether they are on the phone, on voice mail, logged in or available to take a call.

### Business Results

The Cisco Unified Communications system has enabled Flexible Steel's administration staff to spend as much as 50 percent of their time away from the office and still perform their roles as if they were in the office. And on the days when they do travel to the office, they can spend an hour or two working from home to avoid the rush

hour, making their journey shorter and much less stressful.

Mayers says, "We are a pretty simple, straight forward business, not the size you would expect to be using a Cisco solution like this, but we had a particular problem that we needed to address – enabling key staff to remain with the company without needing to relocate. The Cisco Unified Communications system has really moved us down the road of telecommuting and that's what we are benefiting from."

Mayers adds, "For us, the most significant benefit of the Cisco Unified Communications system has been to give our staff the flexibility to work at home or in the office. Our administration staff were people who we really couldn't afford to lose. Cisco has meant a seamless transition from our old location and our manufacturing activity to the new location and a different kind of business."

As far as the working day is concerned, Mayers says that when someone works from home, the Cisco Unified Communications system makes it seem as if they are in the next room.

The Cisco Unified Communications system means that each member of staff has their own telephone number whether they are in the office or at home. It also means that staff can contact each other simply by dialling an extension number. The other party could be in the next room or they could be at home. The Cisco VPN also means that staff working from home have real time access to all of Flexible Steel's business applications. The accounts clerk working from home, for instance, can look at the accounts system to view the latest purchase orders or invoices.

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**Matthew Mayers, Managing Director, Flexible Steel Lacing Company Ltd**

Although the sales staff have always been more mobile than administration staff, the Cisco Unified Communications system has reduced the reliance on expensive mobile phone calls and gives them

real time access to company information held at Bradford. Mayers says, "I have worked in Australia and at other group businesses around the world and our UK sales team is much more self-sufficient. We have sales people all over the UK and some won't come to the office for up to two weeks and yet they can still function effectively with access to all the latest company and operational information."

Mayers also sees technology like the Cisco Unified Communications system enabling Flexible Steel to increase its business. He says, "We are looking to double sales in next year or so and we don't want to add staff, so wherever there are opportunities to drive

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- Cisco 2800 Series Integrated Services Routers
- Cisco 837 ADSL Broadband Router
- Cisco Virtual Private Network

### Voice and IP Communications

- 1 x Cisco Unified CallManager Express
- 11 x Cisco Unified IP phones
- Cisco Unity Express

efficiencies into the business by using technology as we've already done with the Cisco Unified Communications system then we would certainly take advantage of that."

For example, Mayers is considering how the Cisco technology could help to automate stock and inventory management and even create 'intelligent' products. These are parts with active chips that are already installed on a customer's equipment which can identify when they need to be replaced and virtually re-order themselves.



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