

Insurance Agency IT Group Saves IT Time With Centralized Voice Management

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Warner Pacific Insurance Services

- Insurance General Agency
- 103 employees
- 3-person IT staff

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Proactively manage complete Cisco Unified Communications system
- Simplify troubleshooting
- Obtain real-time voice-quality metrics

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Cisco Unified Communications system
- Cisco Unified Operation Manager
- Cisco Unified Service Monitor

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Gained a unified management view of all Cisco Unified Communications components
- Improved overall service quality for employees and customers.
- Saved two hours a week for IT

Warner Pacific Insurance Services uses Cisco Unified Operations Manager and Cisco Unified Service Monitor to monitor and manage voice quality.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

With operations throughout California and Colorado, Warner Pacific Insurance Services provides insurance agents and brokers with tools, resources, and support to represent a wide selection of medical, dental, vision, life and other specialty insurance products. Major insurance carriers use general agencies such as Warner Pacific as a marketing and distribution channel for their products or as an extension of their own sales and service force.

With an IT staff of three, Warner Pacific has always regarded efficient network management as a high priority—one that has become even more important as the network has grown. When the company first adopted Cisco Unified Communications, the IT team used multiple management tools, an approach with two serious limitations. One was the lack of a unified management interface for all solution elements. “If a user called to report a voice quality problem, the first hurdle was simply finding out the port to which the IP phone was connected,” says Mike DeDecker, network administrator. This usually required that an IT staff member stop whatever he was doing and walk over to the phone to investigate. The

other problem was that if an employee complained that voice quality was poor, the IT group did not have a way to objectively measure packet loss or jitter to determine the seriousness of the problem and whether its source was inside or outside the company network. What’s more, IT had no way of knowing about a problem unless an employee reported it.

Warner Pacific sought a more proactive approach to managing its voice system. “It takes a long time to manage networks the old-fashioned way: by pulling reports and looking at past history for a clue to current problems,” says DeDecker. “We wanted to speed up the troubleshooting process and therefore provide better service to our employees and our customers.”

NETWORK SOLUTION

Warner Pacific uses Cisco Unified Operations Manager to monitor the operational status of all components of its Cisco Unified Communications system, including Cisco Unified CallManager, Cisco Unified IP phones, Cisco Unity Messaging, and Cisco Unified MeetingPlace, as well as the underlying Cisco routers and switches. The visual, dashboard-like interface in Cisco Unified Operations Manager, which DeDecker constantly keeps open on his PC, clearly shows the relationship among solution components in real time. “I can find out the status of any phone in the company in about a minute simply by entering its extension,” he says. Previously, DeDecker would have had to physically walk over to the phone’s location, or ask the phone’s owner to look at the phone jack and tell him the port number. Diagnostic capabilities in Cisco Unified Operations Manager enable faster trouble isolation and resolution. Therefore, Warner Pacific can be more proactive, becoming aware of problems, and often resolving them, before employees notice.



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PRODUCT LIST

ROUTING AND SWITCHING

- Cisco Catalyst 6500 switch
- Cisco Catalyst 3700 switches
- Cisco Catalyst 3800 switches

NETWORK MANAGEMENT

- Cisco Unified Operations Manager
- Cisco Unified Service Monitor and Cisco 1040 Sensors

VOICE AND IP COMMUNICATIONS

- Cisco Unified CallManager
- Cisco Unified Survivable Remote Site Telephony
- Cisco Unity Unified Messaging
- Cisco Unified IP phones
- Cisco Unified MeetingPlace
- Cisco Unified MobilityManager

VPN

- Cisco 800 Series Broadband Internet Routers

Cisco Unified Service Monitor provides real-time reporting of voice quality anywhere in the network. It consists of two elements: a hardware sensor and a central software application. Cisco Unified Service Monitor captures and analyzes statistics about the voice session and reports them as a Mean Opinion Score (MOS) every 60 seconds. DeDecker appreciates the ease of use of Cisco Unified Service Monitor. “I set up the Cisco Unified Service Monitor sensor as a sniff port,” he says. “I can move it wherever needed with a simple configuration change. Within seconds, I can switch from watching one IP phone, to multiple IP phones, to all IP phones in the company.”

In a typical scenario, a user calls to report a voice problem and DeDecker needs to determine whether the problem is with the Internet service provider, the router, or the IP phone itself. “Previously, identifying the nature of a voice quality problem often took a full day,” he says. “With Cisco Unified Operations Manager and Cisco Unified Service Monitor I can often identify and resolve the problem in just half an hour.” Recently, for example, when an employee reported poor voice quality, DeDecker used Cisco Unified Operations Manager to quickly discover link latency of 500 to 600 milliseconds—far outside the acceptable range for voice traffic. Using the additional diagnostic capabilities, such as IP SLA tests included in the Cisco Unified Operations Manager, he was able to quickly determine the source of the problem and therefore restore acceptable service more quickly.

In another situation, an employee had moved an IP phone to a router port not configured to allow access. When the employee called the IT help desk, DeDecker used Cisco Unified Operations Manager to instantly identify the problem and was able to remotely reconfigure the port. “I simply entered the extension number and then Cisco Unified Operations Manager showed me that it was connected to port module F01 in building 2,” he says.

Learning to use Cisco Unified Operations Manager was easy because of its intuitive, visual user interface. “It took only half a day till I felt quite comfortable with the capabilities, compared to other management programs that I’m still learning more about after months or years,” says DeDecker.

BUSINESS RESULTS

With Cisco Unified Operations Manager and Cisco Unified Service Monitor, Warner Pacific can monitor the entire communications system, diagnose any problems, and resolve user voice-quality and other issues far more quickly. Business benefits including increasing employee productivity, strengthening Warner Pacific’s brand by providing consistently good service, and avoiding the need to add IT staff.

DeDecker identifies three characteristics of the Cisco Unified Operations Manager that differentiate it from other management solutions he has used:

- *Automated node-to-node testing*—Cisco Unified Operations Manager conducts node-to-node tests, also called IP SLA tests, at intervals throughout the day to monitor the performance of routers for voice traffic. “Node-to-node tests give us the assurance that everything is working well,” says DeDecker. “And if a node is experiencing a problem, we generally find out about it before our users notice. Automated node-by-node tests alone save me a couple of hours per week.”

- *Continuous monitoring of routers*—Cisco Unified Survivable Remote Site Telephony is a feature of the Cisco IOS® Software that detects when the link from the router to the Cisco Unified CallManager server is unavailable, and then automatically redirects the branch office phones to the local router for continuous telephony service. “IT needs to know about the WAN problem so that we can take action to correct the outage, and Cisco Unified Operations Manager provides instant notification either on the console or by paging someone,” says DeDecker.
- *Comprehensive view of all network devices in the solution*—Cisco Unified Operations Manager provides a unified picture of more types of devices than any other management product DeDecker has used. Cisco releases updates for Cisco Unified Operations Manager and Cisco Unified Service Monitor at the same time it releases updates for Cisco Unified CallManager and other solution components, ensuring that all versions of Warner Pacific’s software are synchronized and manageable.

Use of Cisco Unified Operations Manager and Cisco Unified Service Monitor saves several hours weekly for Warner’s IT team—an especially important benefit for companies with small IT staffs. “The ability to isolate problems more quickly enables me to solve many issues in half an hour that previously took a full day,” says DeDecker.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Cisco Unified Operations Manager and the Cisco Unified Service Monitor go to:

http://www.cisco.com/go/iptelephony_management.

To find out more about the Cisco Unified Communications system, go to: <http://www.cisco.com/go/voice> or www.cisco.com/go/unified.

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