

Home Builder Saves Money and Builds Collaborative Culture

Shapell Industries is building on its reputation for innovation and customer satisfaction with Cisco Unified Communications.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
SHAPELL INDUSTRIES, INC. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Industry: Construction and Property Management• Location: Beverly Hills, CA• Employees: 250
CHALLENGE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve collaboration between employees and construction business partners• Respond better to customers
RESULTS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using single network to support voice and data communications saves offices up to 50 percent in telecommunications charges• Employees are easier to reach
SOLUTION <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cisco Unified Communications supports voice, data, and sophisticated call handling and messaging on single network platform

Challenge

For more than 50 years, Shapell Homes has developed a reputation for building quality homes with superb craftsmanship and innovative architecture. The firm serves commercial and residential customers throughout California, and is committed to its clients' satisfaction.

To stay ahead of competitors in a challenging marketplace, Shapell needs consistent, reliable phone communication not only with customers, but with numerous business partners who work with the homebuilder.

"We need to stay in close touch with the various trades we work with to help construct our homes," says John Critikos, VP, CIO at Shapell. "They may call in to communicate with our purchasing department, or contact accounts payable to check on an invoice."

As Shapell grew over the years, the company acquired a mix of different communications systems at office locations in Northern and

Southern California. These aging, separate phone systems made working together difficult, and sometimes created barriers between employees and customers.

"Some of our offices utilized a common phone system, but we could not transfer calls between locations," says Critikos. "If a client called one of our offices and asked for an employee working at another site, they would have to hang up the phone and dial the correct number."

To improve collaboration between employees and business partners, and respond better to customers, Shapell needed a solution that could bring together all of its offices on one phone system. The solution would have to provide sophisticated call handling and messaging features, yet be customizable and easy to use, to work the way the employees did.

"In the past, Shapell had a very traditional approach to business communication. We used our phone system simply to place and receive calls. The Cisco solution has helped move our company culture forward toward a more cohesive, collaborative environment."

– John Critikos, VP, CIO, Shapell Industries, Inc.

Results

To help build a more collaborative, customer-focused business, Shapell installed a Cisco® Unified Communications solution. Cisco Unified Communications lets organizations bring together all of their voice, data, video, and wireless communications on one secure, easy-to-manage network. Because phone calls between offices now run over the company's Cisco network, Shapell immediately began saving money on telecommunications charges.

"We are not paying long distance charges, which is a great benefit from a financial perspective," says Critikos. "Our office managers have noticed that phone bills have gone down significantly, with savings of 50 percent in some cases."

Consolidating Shapell's separate phone systems has also made it faster and easier for customers and business partners to reach the right person, the first time they call. The Cisco solution supports direct inward dialing (DID), so each employee can now be reached at his or her own personal extension.

"In the past, a client or a business partner would dial into the main office number, because employees did not have direct dial extensions," says Critikos. "Now much of that call traffic can bypass our headquarters and go directly to end users, who can handle incoming calls and messages themselves."

If callers are new to the company or do not know an employee's extension, they can simply call one number to get connected to the correct person.

"The solution is very user-friendly," says Critikos. "Instead of having people dedicated to answering calls at each of our offices, we have routed all incoming calls back to our corporate headquarters. This lets us push those calls out to branch offices as needed."

Shapell's new phone system also includes rich voice messaging features that help employees prioritize and better manage their personal communications. Empowering employees with better communication has had a positive impact in making Shapell more proactive and agile.

"With our old system, an operator would receive a call, and all communications were considered highly urgent and highly important," says Critikos. "Shapell is focusing on changing our business culture to be less reactive, and I think the phone system has helped us adjust to this new management philosophy."

The Cisco solution helps employees work more efficiently not just inside the office, but while traveling as well.

"Some individuals at our company are highly mobile, so we have placed Cisco Unified Personal Communicator soft phones on their laptops," says Critikos. "For example, our CFO works from multiple office locations and uses virtual private networking (VPN) to create a secure, encryption connection to our network. Incoming calls are routed directly to him, and he can answer using the Cisco IP Communicator softphone on his laptop. Our mobile employees like the technology, because they can access their office phone and all the network resources they need, so they can stay productive no matter where they are working."

Solution

Shapell replaced its aging office phone systems with Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express software that runs on a Cisco Integrated Services Router (ISR) on the Cisco network. Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express lets small businesses take advantage of the same kinds of phone capabilities found in much larger companies. It provides rich features such as four-digit extension-based dialing, call management functions, conferencing, and much more.

Migrating to the new solution was easy, because the Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express operator console at headquarters can be customized to be as simple or as complex as employees require.

“We configured the operator display to be as minimal as possible,” says Critikos. “Our phone operator is relatively new to using computers, and previously operated a traditional switchboard. Now she can simply click, drag, and drop to answer and direct a call. The system suits her ability and gives her confidence in doing her job.”

To connect a call to the right person, the Shapell phone operator can view lists of employees sorted by name or office location.

“In the past, our operator had to memorize everyone’s extension,” says Critikos. “With our Cisco solution, we don’t need to do that. Our operator can sort employees and manage how information is displayed on her monitor to work more efficiently.”

If clients phone after business hours or on weekends or holidays, an Automated Attendant answers and lets callers look up an employee name in the company directory, then routes the call to that employee’s voice mailbox. Cisco Unity Express voicemail provides easy-to-use telephone prompts and a web-based interface for fast, convenient voicemail, automated attendant, and interactive voice response (IVR) administration.

A Cisco network based on Cisco Integrated Services Routers provides all the performance, availability, and reliability that Shapell requires to keep its critical communications running smoothly. Critikos believes that the new solution has enabled the company to take a major step ahead in maintaining its competitive edge.

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Next Steps

Because the Cisco solution considers phones as just another type of network device, Shapell’s network can easily change and grow to meet new needs.

“We have applied Cisco Unified Communications across four of our main administrative offices, including Beverly Hills, Orange County, Northridge, and Milpitas,” says Critikos. “We hope to add two additional property management offices, and to support one of our field offices later this year. We will set up a temporary office at a construction site, and connect it back to the operator console in our main office. If that model is successful and our users enjoy the services, we plan to replicate this approach at new development sites.”

As a property developer and homebuilder with constantly changing projects and locations, Shapell plans to take full advantage of the flexibility that its new network can provide.

For More Information

To learn more about the Cisco solution, visit www.cisco.com/smallbusiness or contact your authorized Cisco salesperson.



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