

Events Management Firm Gains a Competitive Advantage

Meeting Consultants uses Cisco Unified Communications and IBM Lotus solutions to enable employees to collaborate from any location.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
MEETING CONSULTANTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Event Planning and Meeting Management Atlanta, Georgia 50 employees and full-time contractors
CHALLENGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain a competitive advantage Improve productivity Increase market share Reduce costs
SOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replaced PBX system with Cisco Unified Communications Manager and integrated it with Lotus Sametime instant messaging software Deployed Cisco Unified Contact Center Express and integrated it with Lotus Domino database Deployed Cisco Unity Unified Messaging and integrated it with Lotus Notes email
RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiated the contact center experience Enabled employees to work from home, increasing job satisfaction, environmental sustainability, and business continuity Reduced facilities and communications costs by US\$150,000 annually Enabled real-time, instant communications with top customers

Challenge

When companies stage large events such as business and sales meetings, trade shows, or incentive trips, they can free up time and resources by engaging Meeting Consultants for planning and onsite event management. With offices in Atlanta, Georgia and Boca Raton, Florida, the company has 50 employees and full-time contractors who manage events throughout the United States, Europe, and Singapore. Among the events that Meeting Consultants manages is the annual IBM PartnerWorld Conference.

Efficient communications and collaboration are vital in the fast-paced events management industry. For large events, Meeting Consultants employees bring the contact center with them, so that attendees can quickly resolve issues regarding registration, hotel accommodations, billing, and more. “The more efficiently we can resolve attendees’ issues, the better we make our customers look,” says Casey Cote, president of Meeting Consultants.

Previously, Meeting Consultants used a collection of unintegrated communications systems, including a private branch exchange (PBX) system, separate voicemail accounts for employees’ office phones and cell phones, IBM Lotus Sametime for instant messaging, and IBM Lotus Notes for email. “We wanted a more integrated communications and collaboration environment, to gain a competitive advantage,” Cote says. “Our goals were to provide a superior customer experience in our

contact center, and to enable our employees to collaborate anytime, from any workspace, including home or an event venue.”

Solution

Meeting Consultants met its goals with an integrated Cisco® Unified Communications and IBM Lotus solution. “Cisco Unified Communications system has the scalability and reliability that we need for our communications platform,” says Cote. “In addition, the integration between Cisco Unified Communications and IBM Lotus solutions enhances collaboration, for faster issue resolution.”

Unified Communications

Redundant Cisco Unified Communications Manager and Cisco Unity® Unified Messaging servers in the Atlanta office have replaced the old PBX and voicemail systems. The Boca Raton office no longer needs its own communications equipment, and instead uses a Cisco Integrated Services Router to receive voice and voicemail services from the main office over the network. Employees who work from home can securely use the same voice and voicemail

services available at headquarters using a Cisco Unified IP phone or Cisco IP Communicator software on their laptop, and a Cisco Adaptive Security Appliance 5510 or 5510.

Integration with Lotus Sametime, Lotus Domino, and Lotus Notes

To integrate Cisco Unified Communications with Meeting Consultants' existing Lotus solutions, Meeting Consultants engaged Softchoice, a value-added reseller for Cisco and IBM solutions. The integration between Cisco and IBM solutions enables customer service agents to resolve customer issues while the customer is on the phone instead of transferring them or calling back later. For example, if an event attendee calls with a hotel question, the agent receives a screen pop with caller information from a Lotus Domino database, based on the number that the customer is calling from or calling to, or the registration number that the customer entered. The agent can use Lotus Sametime to contact the hotel manager for an immediate response while the customer is still on the phone. An agent who wants to escalate the chat session into a phone call over the Cisco network can simply click in the Lotus Sametime window, and even conference in the customer.

Integration between Cisco Unity Unified Messaging and Lotus Notes enables employees to play back and manage their voicemail from their email inbox, forward voicemail messages as email attachments, and save the time they used to spend checking messages in two places.

"We deployed the complete solution over a single weekend," says Marcus Owens, account executive, Softchoice. "It took so little time because Cisco Unified Communications is already integrated with Lotus Sametime and Lotus Domino, and Cisco Unity Unified Messaging is already integrated with Lotus Notes. We didn't have to do any time-consuming coding, which also kept costs down."

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—Casey Cote, President, Meeting Consultants

Results

Cisco Unified Communications and the integration with IBM Lotus solutions have given Meeting Consultants a competitive advantage.

Ease of Collaboration

Customers and coworkers can now dial a single number to reach a Meeting Consultants employee in any workspace, including home. Employees use the Cisco Unified Mobility feature for single-number reach so that calls to their office number also ring their cell phone, home phone, or any other number they specify. "Employees appreciate not having to give out their personal cell phone numbers," says Cote.

Superior Customer Experience

"The integration between Cisco Unified Communications and Lotus Sametime and Lotus Domino has reduced call-handling time," says Cote. "This differentiates our service. We've received emails from our customers' customers, complimenting agents on how quickly they resolved an issue." More efficient call handling also makes employees more productive, enabling Meeting Consultants to either assign fewer people to an event or expand their duties.

Cost Savings

Cisco Unified Communications has reduced Meeting Consultants' costs in the following ways:

- **Lower operating and capital costs:** Cisco Unified Communications has reduced facilities and communications costs by about US\$150,000 annually. The savings result from not having to add more office space, eliminating telephone circuits to employees' home offices, lower maintenance costs, and eliminating long-distance fees for calls between Meeting Consultants' offices and home offices.
- **Reduced staffing requirements:** The company no longer needs a receptionist to answer and transfer all calls because Cisco Unified Communications Manager supports direct dial numbers.
- **Faster awareness of need to cancel hotel reservations:** If event attendees call at the end of the business day to cancel a hotel reservation, Meeting Consultants become aware of the message right away because customer service agents can now work on site, in the same time zone.
- **Cost avoidance for new office space:** By enabling employees to work productively from home, Meeting Consultants will avoid or postpone adding new office space. "Our fully burdened cost for employees is 175 percent of salary," says Cote. "The multiplier decreases when we eliminate the need for office space, associated utilities, and furniture."

Increased Employee Satisfaction

Previously, Meeting Consultants could only receive calls in its Atlanta office, which meant that employees had to stay late or start early for events in other time zones. Now, with Cisco Unified Contact Center Express, agents can work in any location with a network connection, including the event venue, with just a Cisco Unified IP phone or Cisco IP Communicator integrated with Lotus Sametime client.

In fact, more than half of the company's employees now work from home, and most of the rest work from home two or three days a week. They have all the collaboration tools that they would have in the office, and no longer need an expensive leased line. "We have great employee retention, and part of the reason is the option to work from home, which improves quality of life and keeps our employees happy and productive," says Cote. Employees also like the savings in fuel costs and their reduced carbon footprint.

Business Continuity

When Meeting Consultants could only answer calls from the office, inclement weather could effectively close the business. Now employees can make and receive calls, manage voicemail, and conduct Lotus Sametime chats from home just as if they were in the office. Customers call the same number and see the same number on their caller ID.

Next Steps

Meeting Consultants plans to increase the value of its investment in Cisco Unified Communications by adding new services. One plan is to add a click-to-chat option on event websites, using Lotus Notes services. Cisco Unified Contact Center Express can intelligently route these requests to a qualified agent, who will respond using Lotus Sametime.

Another plan is to use Cisco Unified Contact Center Express to intelligently route email as well as phone contacts. Emails with credit card billing in the subject line, for example, will be routed to a specific person.

Finally, Meeting Consultants would like to offer a self-service contact center for companies that cannot cost-justify a full contact center service. Softchoice is developing the self-service application using Cisco Unified Contact Center Express interactive voice response (IVR) capabilities and integration with Lotus Domino. Callers will be able to make everyday inquiries such as confirming registration information, checking accommodations, or requesting a duplicate receipt.

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Communications go to: www.cisco.com/go/unifiedcommunications.

PRODUCT LIST
<p>Switches and Routers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco Catalyst® 3560 Switches • Cisco 2811 Integrated Services Routers
<p>Cisco Unified Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco Unified Communications Manager 7.0 • Cisco Unified IP Phones 7942, 7962, 7970 • Cisco IP Communicator • Cisco Unity Unified Messaging • Cisco Unified Contact Center Express
<p>Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco Adaptive Security Appliance 5510 and 5505 • Cisco VPN Client software



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