

Leading Kitchen Designer Helps Customers Build Their Dreams

Thurston Inc. depends on its Cisco network to forge closer relationships with customers and improve sales and design.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
THURSTON INC. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry: Construction • Location: Aspen, CO • Number of Employees: 90 employees
CHALLENGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve responsiveness to customers in a retail environment consisting of several locations, and streamline outmoded business processes
RESULTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased sales, enhanced revenue, and improved customer responsiveness and satisfaction
SOLUTION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unified communications solution, with integrated voice and data communications

Challenge

Thurston Kitchen and Bath is one of the largest independent kitchen and bath companies in the United States. Based in Aspen, Colorado, the company is dedicated to quality craftsmanship and high-touch service. Its 14 locations throughout Colorado focus on serving a wide range of customers.

“We work with consumers in all price points: from customers at the very top to people who are renovating their kitchen on their own,” says Mark Schmidt, vice president of Thurston, Inc.

Every home project requires immediate, personalized service to be successful. However, as Thurston Kitchen and Bath grew, the company found it more and more difficult to provide clients the level of service that the company made its name on. Its communications

network was cobbled together with data networking and private branch exchange (PBX) equipment from multiple vendors, not all of which were compatible. Some of the more rural stores lacked broadband access. This made it hard for stores to communicate with each other or for employees to work at other locations.

“We had individual phone systems of multiple types in every location. Some worked, some didn’t, and together they posed several different connectivity issues,” says Schmidt. “It was difficult for customers to dial a store and try to find a particular employee or business partner. Our speed at putting customers in touch with individuals was very slow.”

The company’s aging data communications systems also made it difficult to modernize its manual, paper-based business processes, further slowing customer service.

“We could not deploy contemporary electronic systems for inventory management, contract generation, or sales processing,” says Schmidt. “This hampered our operations a great deal.”

Thurston needed a communications solution that would make it easier for customers, employees, and business partners to connect with the people and information that they needed, regardless of location. At the same time, the company wanted to upgrade its back office systems to streamline sales, design, and delivery systems.

Results

Thurston implemented a Cisco® Small Business solution that integrated voice and data communications on a single, flexible, easy-to-manage network. With an integrated network solution, employees can now communicate with one another better and faster, to respond to customers more quickly.

“We essentially have one universal phone system, and employees are just four digits away from one another,” says Schmidt. “The Cisco solution gives employees instantaneous communications throughout the entire company, from our accounting department to corporate offices and CAD department, for sales support and assistance. If employees

have a question about a project, they can contact the person they need at their phone extension and find a solution immediately, speeding the customer's experience and getting the product to them faster."

The Cisco solution not only ties together individual offices at Thurston, but supports collaboration through voice conferencing, helping employees at the company to work together more closely.

"We use voice conferencing throughout the company on a weekly or bi-weekly basis for certain teams of designers to assess trends that are happening in their markets," says Schmidt. "Bringing them together lets them collaborate with other people who may be facing similar problems. And it can help inspire new thinking in terms of putting out a much better product to the client."

Integrating all of Thurston's voice and data systems has enabled employees and designers to enjoy not only improved phone communication, but also access sales information and ordering tools with web-based applications.

"Now all our pricing systems and programs are automatically in front of our designers, as well as our consumers. We can get them the information they need more rapidly, and the response has been very positive," says Schmidt.

The company's employees appreciate the new system because it lets them move beyond cumbersome paper-based systems and build solutions for customers more efficiently and accurately.

"We spent so much time spent writing contracts and purchase orders by hand, and faxing them to different vendors," says Meredith O'Connor, certified kitchen designer at Thurston Inc. "Now that I have the web-based ordering system, I can go to any location, even if I'm working from a home office or a different showroom, create an order, and send a PDF to my clients for approval. What used to take days can be accomplished in hours."

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– Mark Schmidt, Vice President, Thurston, Inc.

Solution

To design and build a system that was right for its needs, Thurston worked closely with Qwest Communications, a Cisco Partner. Qwest Communications recommended the Cisco Unified Communications 500 Series for Small Business, a secure, affordable solution that supports all of the company's communications and integrates smoothly with desktop applications.

"When Qwest Communications recommended Cisco, I wasn't surprised," says Schmidt. "Cisco has always been one of my first choices. I've had great experiences with Cisco products every time I've used them for network applications."

The Cisco solution was designed to power fast, real-time communications with transparent call-forwarding and voice-messaging features. Employees can be reached anywhere, enabling them to stay more connected and engaged, on the phone or using a PC, whether they are working in a store or from home.

“The Cisco solution gives Thurston a system that will follow employees wherever they go,” says Carlos Ramirez, business solutions manager at Qwest Communications. “A designer can work from home and be available at any time to receive the most updated drawings and information.”

The Cisco network lets Thurston centralize all of its business functions into two key groups. It delivers product sales support for appliance and cabinet specialists, who work with designers to recommend products that will fit customers’ needs and price range. The solution also supports instant communications between the company’s designers and individual stores, to help customers better visualize what they are about to buy.

Using a web-based network application called Thurston Order Processing System (TOPS), designers and sales team members have instant access to everything they need to set up and process orders for customers.

“All of our resources, such as details on every kind of cabinet we sell, are on one basic site that salespeople can use to generate sales quotations, presentations, and client contracts,” says Schmidt. “The system streamlines ordering, and has also allowed us to train people rapidly.”

With its scalable Cisco network in place, Thurston can continue to expand operations and take on new business challenges in the years ahead.

“Their network is capable of growing with them as the business grows,” says Ramirez. “It is secure, and provides large enough bandwidth to add applications to their network, which gives them flexibility over the long term that they never had before.”

For More Information

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



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