



VersaCold Logistics improves communication with IP telephony

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– Paul Rovella, IT Manager Australia, VersaCold Logistics

VersaCold Logistics is one of the world’s largest cold storage and distribution networks. It operates more than 120 temperature-controlled warehouses and distribution centres in Australia, Argentina, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. The Australian branch employs about 1,000 people and operates cold storage facilities in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia.

Critical business issue

VersaCold Logistics’ ageing PBX phone system was becoming more expensive to maintain each year. In 2009, the company decided that an office relocation was the ideal time to upgrade to IP telephony.

“Our support centre in Western Sydney was moving to a new location, so it was a great opportunity to start afresh and update the communications technology for the 50 staff who work there,” says Paul Rovella, IT Manager Australia, VersaCold Logistics. “In addition, the cost of maintaining our PBX system just kept rising, so it made sense to upgrade to IP telephony.”

Support centre staff often had to switch desks, so the company also wanted a phone system that was easy to administer.

“Any new system we considered had to be really simple to manage, so we could spend less time updating the phone directory and more time on IT planning,” says Rovella.

VersaCold also wanted to improve internal communication in one of its Sydney cold storage warehouses by leveraging an existing Cisco wireless network, which was primarily used for RF tracking on frozen goods, by adding wireless IP phones for its 15 warehouse staff.

The solution

In December 2009 with the assistance of Oriel Technologies, VersaCold introduced an IP telephony network in its new Sydney head office. The company rolled out Cisco Unity Express for voicemail, Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express (previously known as CallManager Express), 70 Cisco IP phones (7911 and 7942 models) and two Cisco IP conference phones (7937G). It also installed 15 Cisco Unified Wireless IP wireless phones (7920) in its Sydney warehouse.

The intuitive management interface in Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express makes moves, adds and changes to the directory fast and easy to manage.

“To add a user we just log on to the administration portal, add their name and extension number, plug it the phone and they’re up and running. It’s so much easier to manage than the old phone system.”

PARTNER PROFILE

Oriel Technologies

Oriel provides end-to-end IT infrastructure solutions and services. Its specialist expertise in data infrastructure, business continuity and unified communications is combined with the exceptional skills and capability of its consulting, integration and managed services portfolio, to provide customised solutions that help its clients achieve their business objectives.

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According to Rovella, VersaCold's backend network was based on Cisco technology, so it made sense to deploy Cisco telephony infrastructure. "We looked at several IP telephony offerings but decided that Cisco was the way to go, because of its ease of use and compatibility with our existing technology."

The new system is used in its Sydney-based Australian support centre, but the company plans to introduce IP telephony in its offices, warehouses and distribution centres in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia.

Oriel Technologies worked with Rovella and VersaCold's IT department to design and project manage the installation of the IP telephony network.

"We looked at four different IT infrastructure partners and chose Oriel," says Rovella. "Their quote was not the least expensive, but it was definitely the most cost-effective. We were really happy with their service during the design and installation phases."

To minimise potential disruption to business caused by the office relocation, VersaCold brought its existing number range with it to the new office. This required a lot of work with Telstra, which Oriel assisted with and built into the scope of its project management.

"It was great to have Oriel's help dealing with Telstra and making sure the transition to the new site went without a hitch," says Rovella.

To ensure a smooth transition to the new phone system, Oriel ran training sessions with VersaCold staff on how to use their new Cisco IP phones, including the phone directory features.

The outcomes for VersaCold Logistics

1. Improved internal phone administration and support

Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express has dramatically simplified phone administration duties for VersaCold's IT department.

"The best thing about the new phone system is that it's so easy to use," Rovella says. "The centralised management, monitoring and provisioning tools make it really easy for the IT team to maintain the phone systems. We can add or remove people on our telephone directory, quickly and simply, without having to call a phone company to do it for us."

2. Better employee communication and customer service

VersaCold has a platform for growth that allows it to scale and add new applications as its business evolves.

Warehouse staff are easier to contact and can work more efficiently with their wireless IP phones, which operate on VersaCold's existing Cisco wireless network in conjunction with Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express.

"The wireless IP phones will really improve warehouse communication," says Alison Wrubik, Senior Account Manager, Oriel. "And by leveraging their existing Cisco network infrastructure, VersaCold can really make the most of IP telephony in a cost effective way."

VersaCold staff also enjoy better clarity of sound on their new IP phones, especially when using speaker phone.

"The clarity of sound on the Cisco IP phones is far better than our old phones – they're much easier to use on speaker phone for hands-free chatting or for conferencing," says Rovella.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Cisco Unity Express

Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express (formerly known as Cisco Unified CallManager Express)

Cisco Unified IP Phones (7900 Series)

Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phone 7920

Cisco IP Conference Phone 7937G

Oriel Managed Services

3. High-quality support from Oriel

VersaCold has the added assurance of premium support for its unified communications systems through Oriel Managed Services.

“We remotely monitor and manage VersaCold’s IP telephony network using ORIZON, our infrastructure management platform,” says Wrbik.

The company’s IT department look after Moves, Adds, Changes and Deletions (MACDs) on its system, while Oriel manages the entire unified communications environment. As part of Oriel’s Managed Services, VersaCold has three years’ on-site break-fix support, which ensures the company has optimal phone performance and system availability at all times.

“Oriel Managed Services really frees VersaCold to focus on strategic business initiatives, knowing that the day-to-day running of their IT environment is in good hands,” adds Wrbik.

4. Future plans: a platform for growth

VersaCold now has a strong foundation on which to build a business-wide, converged voice and data system. According to Wrbik, the best part is that when they do choose to expand their unified communications system, VersaCold will waste almost none of its previous investment along the way.

“A step-by-step approach to introducing unified communications is the right way to go for companies with multiple sites and restricted time frames and budgets,” says Wrbik.

VersaCold can now move its remaining six offices to unified communications one at a time, using Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express routers at each site.

“The whole system can then be migrated to a centrally managed Cisco Unified Communications Manager system,” explains Wrbik. “The Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express routers at each site can then be configured for Cisco’s Survivable Remote Site Telephony under the same licence.”

VersaCold’s employees will then be able to enjoy the benefits of centralised unified communication, including Cisco Unified Presence, audio and video conferencing, messaging, and click-to-dial applications.

“We’re looking forward to moving to full unified communications,” says Rovella. “We’ll not only save on cost calls between offices – Cisco Unified Presence will make it much faster and easier to communicate, internally and with our clients.”

For more information

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