



Belkin cuts costs, streamlines management with integrated IP telephony solution

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– Craig Fallone, Systems Administrator, Belkin

Belkin International is a global supplier of networking solutions, laptop and media player accessories, firewire and USB cables, and other products that provide computer and consumer electronics users with seamless integration into their homes and while on the move. Since its inception in 1983, Belkin has become one of the fastest growing IT companies worldwide with more than 1,000 employees and sales of US\$1 billion. Belkin's Australian head office is located at Tuggerah on the NSW Central Coast.

Business challenge

Prior to 2006, Belkin's customer service unit, located at West Gosford on the NSW Central Coast, was using an unreliable IP telephony platform. This solution offered limited functionality for the growing business, which was planning a move to a new office in Tuggerah.

“Belkin grew from two helpdesk staff to ten and we needed an IP-based system that offered better reporting and could be customised to meet our needs,” says Craig Fallone, Systems Administrator, Belkin.

“The old system was unreliable and would often fall over and need to be restarted. We needed new IP telephony infrastructure that would grow with the business.”

Solution

In mid-2006, Belkin engaged Cisco Gold Certified Partner Dimension Data to design and implement an IP telephony solution based on the Cisco Unified Communications platform. The contact centre solution needed to be flexible enough to accommodate Belkin's growth.

The company also wanted to integrate traditional voicemail technology with its Microsoft Exchange email platform. To support its requirements, Belkin deployed a Cisco Unified Communications Manager Cluster to support an IP telephony backbone; Cisco Unified Contact Centre Express (UCCX) to support its call centre, and Cisco Unity to provide voicemail functionality and integration with Microsoft Exchange.

The IP telephony network is attached to several Cisco Catalyst 2960 Power-over-Ethernet switches and two Cisco Series 2800 routers. It runs on top of a new Cisco-based data network at the new office in Tuggerah.

Cisco 7911, Cisco 7961, and Cisco 7941 IP handsets were also deployed, with each model chosen to fit an individual's location, business function and business group.

The Cisco call centre solution supports 15 customer service representatives working at Belkin's customer service unit – five staff who take calls from customers across Australia and New Zealand who have questions about the features and functions of Belkin's products, and ten service desk staff who handle support calls.

The system's interactive voice response (IVR) menu routes calls to different agents based on their skills and product knowledge. As call loads increase, overflow calls can be handed off to an offshore service provider.

“The Cisco solution has enabled us to customise almost everything for our call centre – from reason codes or functions that explain why a user is logged out of the system – to menu scripts.”

“We looked at several different providers but the Cisco solution made sense for a lot of reasons,” says Fallone. “Importantly, our offices in the United States and the United Kingdom are also using Cisco so it was good to have the same equipment at all locations.”

The Cisco solution is easily customised to support the requirements of Belkin’s call centre, unlike the competing systems that were also considered during the selection process.

“It has enabled us to customise almost everything for our call centre – from reason codes or functions that explain why a user is logged out of the system – to menu scripts,” says Fallone.

Belkin’s managers take advantage of the call reporting features to view the number of customer calls, which options customers select through the system’s IVR function and, importantly, to monitor the performance of call centre agents.

Managers can determine which agents are taking the most calls and whether or not they are addressing the customer’s requirements within a specific timeframe. Integration with Microsoft Active Directory allows the phone attendant to look up an individual’s name and view the status of their phone to determine whether they are at their desk, on a call or away from the office.

Belkin also uses Cisco’s Meet-Me conferencing facility to initiate in-house conferences between several people using a single Cisco IP handset. A chat function built into UCCX also allows call centre agents to send instant messages to each other during calls. This feature has helped Belkin achieve a high level of first-time call resolution within its call centre.

The Cisco solution also provides call centre agents with the ability to view how many callers are in the queue and many other call statistics that help them answer and deal with customer calls faster.

Benefits

Streamlined customer service

Cisco UCCX provides Belkin with greater visibility across its call centre, allowing managers to make quick decisions that keep its customer service operation running smoothly.

As the call centre load increases, the system allows Belkin to easily allocate more customer service staff to take calls and hand off overflow calls to the outsourced provider.

It automatically determines whether the call stays in-house or is passed to the outsourced provider based on which product the caller selects using the IVR function.

“Before we deployed the system, we had around 10 internal helpdesk staff taking calls from customers,” says Fallone. “Customers could wait for one hour for service because we were getting too many calls and we didn’t have enough staff. Now, if customers wait five minutes, the system automatically routes the call to the outsourced service provider.

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System configurations changed easily

Belkin can make changes to the Cisco system ‘on the fly’. “If one of our technical support staff members is on holidays and another is sick, we can easily bring customer care staff online to take calls or push more calls across to our outsourced provider,” says Fallone.

Product issues solved faster

Belkin uses call reporting features to identify potential problems with certain products and take action to solve them. “For instance, we can see if there has been an increase in customer calls relating to our modems based on call reports,” says Fallone.

Call costs reduced with ‘trunking’ capability

Call trunking capabilities allow Belkin to make calls from the Australian head office to its global headquarters in the United States very cheaply. “It’s actually cheaper for us to call the United States than call a local number in Australia so we will make some big cost savings in the long run,” says Fallone.

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