



The Salvation Army Streamlines Call Centre Operations, Cuts Costs with IP Telephony

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– Larry Reed, IT Services Manager, The Salvation Army, Australia Southern Territory

Established in the United Kingdom in 1865, The Salvation Army offers a broad range of community services as part of the international Christian church. It was founded in Australia on 5 September 1880, when John Gore and Edward Saunders led the first meeting in Adelaide's Botanic Park.

Today, The Salvation Army provides services to members of the community in greatest need. These services include aged care, community care ministries, aid for families in need, court and prison services, disabled services, employment and emergency services, counselling, and support for children and youths.

Business challenge

In early 2008, The Salvation Army relocated its head office from the Melbourne suburb of Mont Albert to Blackburn. The move prompted the organisation to consider refreshing its ageing PABX system.

“Our system was getting old and could not provide the call reporting and management functionality that we required,” said Larry Reed, IT Services Manager, The Salvation Army, Australia Southern Territory.

The Salvation Army's call centre in Melbourne's Noble Park also required a system that would give managers more visibility over calls. This call centre takes calls from people in Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania who wish to donate items to Salvos Stores.

“Calls were dropping out frequently, which had the potential to affect the number of donations that we received,” said Reed. “We weren't able to visualise what was happening in the call centre because we had very limited reporting functionality.”

Solution

In March 2008, The Salvation Army deployed a new IP telephony network based on Cisco Unified Communications Manager (UCM) to reduce call costs and improve communication at its head office. Shortly after, the organisation engaged Cisco partner Dimension Data to deploy and manage a new contact centre solution based on Cisco Unified Contact Center Express (UCCX). This solution runs on top of the Cisco UCM.

The IP telephony network is attached to several Cisco Catalyst 3560, Cisco Catalyst 3750, Cisco Catalyst 2950 Series switches and Cisco 2800 Series routers. Cisco 7941, Cisco 7942, Cisco 7945, Cisco 7961 and Cisco 7962 IP handsets were deployed across the head office, the call centre and at some remote locations.

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The Cisco solution enables 65 users at The Salvation Army’s call centre and head office to provide a high level of service to thousands of people who need assistance or want to make a donation.

It also provides managers with the reporting tools to make better staffing decisions. Managers can log in and monitor calls in real time and even coach call centre agents.

“We can locate a contact centre agent from anywhere within the organisation and are not tied to a single geographic position,” said Reed. “Managers can also now understand what is really happening inside our call centre.”

At head office, calls are now directed to the correct department, ensuring that callers are speaking to the right people. The solution is also used by The Salvation Army’s helpdesk staff to address technical issues. These staff use the system’s interactive voice response (IVR) selection menu to record messages about known network problems.

“If there’s a network outage in Geelong, for instance, they can record a message indicating that there is an issue and users will be notified when it is rectified,” said Reed. “This frees up our helpdesk operators to focus on other issues rather than receive numerous calls about the same problem.”

The IVR function is also used to direct callers to the appropriate payroll officer in the payroll department. “This internal IVR adds to the external IVR that used to direct people to staff at headquarters, in our fundraising department and at crisis centres,” said Reed.

Receptionists at the organisation use an Arc Solutions management console, which integrates with Cisco’s Unified Communications platform, to effectively manage all calls coming into head office. Cisco Unity provides integration with phone lists in Lotus Notes, which allows staff to listen to voice mails on their PCs and handheld devices.

Number recognition also allows The Salvation Army to distribute recorded messages that are unique to each State. “If a call comes from South Australia or Western Australia, we can distribute recorded messages or campaigns that are relevant to these States even though the calls are coming into our contact centre in Melbourne,” said Reed.

The network was tested during the Victoria bushfires in January 2009, when The Salvation Army had to mobilise additional call centre staff for an expected spike in calls from families who would need support.

“We were still in the middle of the project but within two days, we were able to add an additional 20 handsets to our network to handle calls from families affected by the fires,” said Reed.

Benefits

Improved call visibility, reduced internal call costs

The Cisco UCCX solution has provided The Salvation Army with greater visibility and reporting across its call centre and at head office, allowing the organisation to make more informed decisions about required staffing levels at any given time, particularly during peak periods.

“Managers can create new call queues when required and we have the potential to handle double the number of calls that we are receiving now, which gives us a lot of room for future growth,” said Reed.

The system also allows The Salvation Army to place calls to its headquarters in the United Kingdom at no cost. "Our counterparts at our international headquarters are using the same system so calls between our head office in Melbourne and headquarters are treated as internal calls," said Reed.

Helpdesk staff save time, built-in redundancy provides protection

With the IVR system in place, helpdesk staff save at least one hour per day on calls relating to a single issue. "This allows these staff to make better use of their time and get issues fixed faster," said Reed.

The system's built-in redundancy also provides failover protection if the core telephone system and high-end contact centre functionality fails. Cisco UCCX has been configured with Cisco Unified Survivable Remote Site (SRST) technology, connected to a Cisco 2800 Series router in Noble Park.

"This platform provides us with backup call control," said Reed. "If the system does go down, we can still do basic call queuing so that calls are not lost and our call centre can continue to take calls."

Managed service keeps network running smoothly

The entire telephony solution is delivered under a managed service, which takes the pressure off The Salvation Army's internal IT staff and ensures the infrastructure is up to date and running smoothly. Dimension Data manages the organisation's IP telephony and call centre infrastructure from its Melbourne-based Global Service Centre.

"Dimension Data constantly monitors our hardware and software, provisions new users when necessary, and will upload security patches as they are released," said Reed.

The new platform will also allow The Salvation Army to do telephone-based marketing in the future.

"The next logical step will be to integrate the system with our customer relationship management software to create more targeted marketing campaigns to encourage people to donate to the organisation," Reed said.

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