



Bushman's Tanks integrates regional branches and saves call costs with Cisco Unified Communications solution

“The Unified Communications solution has set up our business for the future. We'll be able to run a slicker sales operation, cut down on administration and make hefty savings on our national and international phone bills.”

– Geoff Quattromani, IT Support Manager, Bushman's Tanks

Bushman's Tanks is a manufacturer of liquid storage tanks for personal and industrial use. It is the Australian subsidiary of US-based multinational Channell Corporation.

Its main business is the supply of liquid storage tanks and accessories to Australian towns and districts for domestic, agricultural and industrial use. The company employs around 500 people, 300 of them factory workers and 200 office staff. It maintains strong links with its parent company, which manufactures and supplies telecommunications products to Australia and other countries.

Bushman's Tanks' head office is in Sydney, New South Wales, and it has five manufacturing plants in Cavan, South Australia, Dalby and Wacol, Queensland, Orange, NSW, and Terang, Victoria. The main sales office is in Sydney, although the firm's regional sites also operate smaller sales offices.

Business challenge

Bushman's Tanks' telephony environment was far from ideal. The biggest concern was the high cost of calls made between its various Australian branches.

“The bulk of our telecommunications spending was on calls between our offices – for example, sales people calling the dispatch guys at another site to track the progress of customer orders,” says Geoff Quattromani, IT Support Manager at Bushman's Tanks.

Call quality was another issue. Sales staff complained that calls would sometimes be cut off midway, which was especially problematic when talking to potential customers.

“The dropout rate on calls made to the company's toll-free sales number was sometimes as high as 15 to 20 per cent,” says Quattromani.

The poor telephony environment risked harming the company's reputation.

“Most staff didn't even have their own extension numbers, so they couldn't be reached directly from outside,” says Quattromani. “This placed undue strain on the company's receptionists, who had to field virtually every call that was coming into the office.”

The absence of a voicemail system meant that a large number of calls to the sales number would go missing, causing lost revenue opportunities. Redirecting calls internally was a further chore. To transfer calls, staff relied on paper lists of colleagues' names and numbers that had to be updated weekly.

The company was looking to accomplish three things at once: slash its telephone bills; boost sales by making its phone systems more reliable; and increase the effectiveness of internal communication by enhancing the functionality of its phone handsets.

Solution

Bushman's Tanks already had plans to relocate its Sydney headquarters. The proposed move gave the firm an ideal opportunity to think about updating its telephony environment.

Bushman's Tanks wanted to make sure the technology it installed would be robust and work optimally with Cisco network components that were already in place.

"We decided that since we needed a new system, we might as well make a long-term investment that would set the company up for the future," says Quattromani.

Bushman's Tanks studied proposals from two telephony vendors. One proposed a traditional PABX system, which the company rejected in favour of the Cisco Unified Communications solution put forward by systems integrator Efficient Data Communications (EDC).

The relocated Sydney office was the first to install the new telephony system in September 2006. Cavan was up and running soon afterwards in February 2007, followed by Orange in March. At time of writing, in June, the Terang site was in the process of implementing the Cisco Unified Communications solution and Dalby was slated to be next.

"Bushman's Tanks' parent company Channell is taking care of the telecommunications component while we focus on the hardware and the implementation," says Darren Lynn, Senior Communication Architect at EDC.

Each regional telephony system is operating independently at the moment. The next step is to link the sites together, along with Channell Corporation's US offices, to create a unified IP communications environment.

Working with EDC, Bushman's Tanks installed a Cisco 3825 integrated services router and two Cisco 3750 Power over Ethernet switches at the new head office, and the Cisco 2811 integrated services router in each of the five local sites.

EDC has also rolled out Catalyst 3560 switches to all the sites, as well as 150 IP phones (7940 and 7960 models). Approximately 70 of the phones have been installed at the Sydney office, with 10 to 15 planned for each branch office.

EDC is also installing Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express and Cisco Unity Express for IP phones at each of the sites.

Results

Many of the benefits of a unified IP communications environment will be realised after the various branch systems are integrated.

"The Unified Communications solution has set up our business for the future," says Quattromani. "We'll be able to run a slicker sales operation, cut down on administration and make hefty savings on our national and international phone bills."

Professional phones and fewer lost calls

The new telephony solution gives each member of staff their own three-digit extension number. This is helping to bolster the firm's professional image and personalise its customer service operations, not to mention freeing up receptionists' time. The new voicemail function means that fewer calls go missing and more leads are followed up.

The directory feature on the new IP phones is also helping to smooth communications within and between branch sites. Staff can locate their co-workers' numbers and dial them directly using the screens on their handsets.

"The directory system works within each new telephony site but will shortly work across all the Australian branches," says Quattromani. "The long-term plan is for Channell Corporation in the US to become part of the same network."

Reduced call costs and improved sales function

Once the local telephony environments have been fully integrated, the cost of calls between sites – which will travel over the IP backbone – is set to fall dramatically. Moreover, once the US integration is completed the cost of international calls to Channell Corporation will also come down substantially.

Bushman's Tanks' new telephony infrastructure has also paved the way for the company to improve its call centre operations.

Calls to the company's toll-free sales line can now be terminated locally and routed automatically over the IP infrastructure to the Sydney call centre. From there they can be dealt with directly by a call centre sales representative, or if necessary directed back to one of the regional offices

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Simpler administration

Bushman's Tanks can now manage its telephony environment from a single location.

“The new system makes things much easier,” explains Quattromani. “I can set up extension numbers and voicemail for new or recently relocated staff from home if I need to, using a web interface.”

Being able to manage such changes remotely also saves the company significant IT administration and travel costs.

A further benefit is that the new environment embeds a lot of additional functionality that could help streamline the firm's operations. For instance, the company is looking at introducing an in-built queuing capability as well as call monitoring, which will help extract useful information about sales representatives' use of time and improve customer service.

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