



First National agency builds its business with new Cisco Unified Communications solution for the small-to-medium business market

“Cisco’s Unified Communications 500 (UC500) Series for SMBs was the perfect solution for what our new commercial property office needed – high-end functionality in one easy-to-manage compact system, at an affordable price.”

– Andrew Mackintosh, Director, Mackintosh First National

Located in Camberwell in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs, Mackintosh First National Real Estate is a second-generation family-run business. It has experience in residential and commercial property sales, purchases, management and leasing.

Mackintosh First National is a part of First National Real Estate, one of Australia’s largest realty groups with offices across Australia. A small group of independently owned Victorian agents founded First National in 1981 to challenge the supremacy of larger real estate franchises.

Business challenge

In the real estate business, the secret to success rests in your ability to work your network of clients and buyers. Communications is key. “The phone is our lifeline,” says Andrew Mackintosh, Director of Mackintosh First National. “In our line of work, it’s essential you have a communications system second to none.”

This was a priority for Mackintosh First National when it decided to establish a second office, specialising in commercial property, in the inner-Melbourne suburb of South Yarra. The new office in South Yarra needed a compact communications fit-out that could accommodate up to eight agency staff and was both flexible and easy to use.

“We were looking for a cost-effective solution that didn’t compromise an inch on quality,” explains Mackintosh. “As a greenfield site, we had this great opportunity to install a system that addressed our specific business needs.”

Mackintosh First National was also keen to deploy a telephony solution that was compatible with the First National Real Estate group’s long-term communications strategy. In early 2007, First National had overhauled the aging telephony network in its Melbourne head office in Richmond with a state-of-the-art, end-to-end Cisco Unified Communications solution.

The new Cisco system involved an upgrade to an IP-based voice and data platform – which included installing new Cisco switches, routers and handsets – as part of a bigger plan to roll out a nationwide private communications network.

Solution

Mackintosh First National approached Cisco Business Partner and preferred supplier Comscentre, which had managed the head office upgrade. For Comscentre, it didn’t take long to work out the best solution for the new office. Cisco’s new Unified Communications 500 (UC500) Series, specially designed for small business, was ideal.

“It was a perfect fit,” says Scott Earle, the Victorian Distribution Manager for Comscentre. “Cisco UC500 was the product we had been eagerly anticipating. It is compact, affordable and easy to manage – everything that fitted Mackintosh’s business needs.”

The Cisco UC500 has proven enormously popular in a very short time. In less than six months, Comscentre deployed more than 30 Cisco UC500 systems into First National offices Australia-wide.

The UC500 combines voice, data, voicemail, Automated Attendant, video, security and wireless in the one compact system and eliminates the need for multiple servers. The product also works with existing desktop applications such as calendar, email, and customer relationship management programs.

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Results

Lower costs, greater savings

Bottom line, Cisco’s UC500 is a more cost-efficient option. “You’re always mindful of costs when you’re starting a business from scratch,” says Mackintosh.

According to Earle, the UC500 provides the SMB market with more choice. “Now that Cisco has entered the SMB market with the UC500, we can offer enterprise functionality at SMB prices. Mackintosh First National also saves money by using one provider for equipment and installation repair telco services,” he says.

Easy to manage and maintain

Unlike traditional phone set-ups that “typically have half a dozen devices, such as a PABX, router, firewall and switch, in a communications rack taking up a chunk of space in a back room”, the UC500 is tucked out of the way, says Earle.

“The new South Yarra office wasn’t much bigger than a shoebox,” says Mackintosh. “We didn’t have much choice. We needed a system that was incredibly compact, highly capable and was compatible with head office’s communications platform.”

If there are any technical issues to deal with, Mackintosh doesn’t want his staff tied up chasing various technicians or different companies.

“It’s very important that problems, if they arise, can be dealt with quickly because we cannot afford our phone system to be down,” says Mackintosh.

Cheaper phone bills

Mackintosh saves on call costs by being connected, via the IP backbone, to the First National head office. Each time one of his agents contacts the head office, the call is free because the South Yarra office is now included in the group’s private communications network.

There is also no charge if the office calls any other First National Real Estate agency that is connected to the group private network.

In fact, as the commercial property offshoot develops, Mackintosh is eager to introduce the same UC500 Unified Communications solution to his residential agency in Camberwell.

“There’s likely to be a fair bit of telephone traffic going back and forth between the Camberwell and South Yarra offices,” says Mackintosh. “If we’re making those calls over an IP backbone on First National’s private network, it won’t cost us a cent.

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Future benefits with new innovations

First National member real estate agencies will also benefit from further innovations in the future.

For example, as more First National members hitch their agency’s telephony systems to the group’s private network, agents like Mackintosh will continue to benefit from more than just free calls. They will be able to take advantage of new applications and capabilities as these become available through the First National network.

The Cisco Media Player, in particular, can create a more dynamic customer experience. With Media Player, First National can look forward to sending out videos of properties for sale from head office to each branch across the network. The videos can then be displayed in each First National shopfront - just one of the exciting opportunities available to the First National team.

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