



## CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY

# ABACUS INVESTS IN IP TELEPHONY TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE AND ENHANCE PRODUCTIVITY

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### CUSTOMER NAME

- Abacus Travel Systems

#### INDUSTRY

- Travel & Transportation

#### BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Replace traditional PABX with flexible and feature-rich telephony solution
- Provide customers with multiple channels of communicating with Abacus
- Reduce costs of network maintenance and management

#### NETWORK SOLUTION

- Cisco IP Telephony Solution

#### BUSINESS VALUE

- Cost savings from monthly telecommunications charges, lower maintenance charges, more lines and reduced dependence on vendor support for moves, adds and changes
- Improved call center operations with the ability to process more calls and offer customers more options than before
- Employees can stay connected even when they are on the road
- Scalable system that can grow with the business

**Asia Pacific's leading travel information and reservations systems provider moves to IP telephony platform to improve customer service, staff productivity and mobility, while ensuring investment protection.**

#### BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Founded in 1989, Abacus' core business lies in providing a fully integrated one-stop service for all travel booking needs, including airline, hotel, car rental, cruise and insurance. With more than 10,000 agency locations in 22 markets worldwide, Abacus empowers travel agents to make real-time reservations with a wide array of travel suppliers. In addition to travel agencies, Abacus empowers corporate end-users, airlines and just about every other facet of the travel industry.

Abacus knows the region and the ever-changing travel industry and provides innovative solutions and services to ensure challenges are tackled head on. To-date, it has invested more than S\$60 million in localizing, innovating and enhancing solutions that enable Asia Pacific's travel industry to make the most of the latest technology available.



Andrew Yip,  
General Manager,  
Abacus Travel Systems

Andrew Yip, General Manager, Abacus Travel Systems Pte Ltd, emphasized the organization's aim to be the number one facilitator for the travel and leisure industry. "Today, we have about 300 agents with over 2000 workstations in Singapore and we are the market leader both here and across the region. Our aim is to continue to grow by developing and delivering world-class solutions and services for our customers by leveraging the latest technology available in the market."

In 2004, Abacus embarked on an exercise to replace its PABX

system, which was becoming obsolete. Tan Kian, Head Systems & IT Services, Abacus Travel Systems Pte Ltd, explained that they were looking for much more than just a simple phone replacement. "The need to replace our PABX system was an opportunity in many ways. We wanted to do more than simply get a new PABX. We are on the constant lookout for ways to innovate and provide new solutions that will help our customers to win new business."

"Traditional legacy PABX systems limit the number of ways our customers can interact with us. Our efforts to set up a standalone Web-based Self-help and online Helpdesk services have seen limited success due to customers' cultural preference to make a phone call and interact with a live Helpdesk Support officer. We needed a system that would be able to integrate all these channels into a seamless whole.

"Plus we need to keep our costs down as much as possible given the highly competitive nature of the travel industry. So the new phone system we invested in also needed to help us address these restrictions. After considering all these factors, we decided to go for an IP PABX system."

#### NETWORK SOLUTION

The decision to go with IP telephony having been made, the next step was to identify key requirements and shortlist the available solutions in the market. Abacus needed a system that would be stable, deliver richer functionalities than traditional PABX systems and integrate easily with other computer telephony applications.

Abacus worked with its systems integration partner, NEC Solutions Asia Pacific Pte Ltd, to scope out the requirements in detail. The new system would have to support between 400 to 800 calls per day. They wanted to maintain the size of the call center – through interactive voice response or FAQ features – while increasing its call handling capabilities, and a call center reporting system that is flexibility and easily customized.

NEC recommended the Cisco IP Telephony Solution. The entire roll-out was completed and went 100 percent live within two months. The solution comprised Cisco Catalyst Switches, Cisco Internet Routers, Cisco CallManager; Cisco Unity Voice Messaging; Cisco Voice Gateway; Cisco IP Contact Center Express, and Cisco IP Phones 7960G, 7940G, 7912 and 7905.

**“The Cisco IP Telephony Solution integrates phone and online web services and will help us make the transition from just a call center to a truly full-fledged Customer Care Center through increased operational efficiencies and exceptional customer care leading to retention and increase of market share.”**

– Tan Kian, Head Systems & IT Services, Abacus Travel Systems Pte Ltd



## **BUSINESS VALUE**

The business value that Abacus has derived from the IP telephony implementation can be broken into four main categories: cost savings, servicing more customers with same resources, improved mobility for workforce and investment protection for the future.

### **Cost Savings**

When Abacus switched from their traditional PABX system to the Cisco IP Telephony Solution, they enjoyed immediate 7 percent savings from monthly telecommunications charges. At the same time, they enjoyed 25 percent more circuits.

More cost savings came in the form of the new ability to cater to phone relocations and other changes, as well as generation of customizable real-time and historical reports of call center call patterns, without having to rely on external resources.

Furthermore, end-users have been able to improve their productivity with the advanced features on the Cisco IP Phones, including customizable online directories, hands-free dialling, call back functions, missed and placed calls and the real-time “SMARTCab” online booking application from NexLabs Pte Ltd.

### **Improved Call Center Operations**

“With the Cisco IP Telephony Solution, we can explore the possible set up of a subscription-based Helpdesk service by providing tie-lines between our customers and our company using existing data circuits. We envisage the ability to process more calls each day with IVR, improved access self-help options, voice mail and providing alternative channels for them to reach us – for example, email or fax,” said Mr Tan.

Today, Abacus receives about 400 calls per day averaging five minutes each, including up to one minute spent identifying the caller and pulling out the relevant records. What Abacus hopes to do in the near future is to issue account IDs to their customer base so that their records can be automatically retrieved when they call in. “Shaving one minute per call adds up to time savings of almost seven hours a day, resulting in more calls answered and tremendous cost savings per year.

“We will introduce more features as we go along. For example, to become a truly multi-media contact center, we foresee the introduction of soft-phones for our customers to enable them to reach us with one click of an icon on their computers. The system will also be linked to backend order processing systems to streamline the entire process.

“The Cisco IP Telephony Solution integrates phone and online web services and will help us make the transition from just a call center to a truly full-fledged Customer Care Center through increased operational efficiencies and exceptional customer care leading to retention and increase of market share,” concluded Mr Tan.

### **A More Mobile and Happier Workforce**

A third advantage of the Cisco IP Telephony Solution is the increased flexibility and mobility it provides to Abacus’ employees. “With the Cisco solution in place, our Account Managers, who are constantly on the road, will be able to call back and retrieve voicemail and have email read-back using speech-enabled technology. Or if they are in the vicinity of any of the many Internet hotspots, they can access their unified voicemail, email and fax in-box to read and process messages.”



With the IP PABX and a broadband internet connection, Abacus can now recruit ex-employees who have since left the industry to work on a part-time basis from home as demand requires. The company is also better able to accommodate requests from some employees to work from home. This will contribute to retention of good workers over time. “IP telephony will give new agility to our workforce and enable us to meet the increasing demands of our customers from anywhere and anytime.”

Remote office support is also a critical component of Abacus’ Business Continuity Plans for operating from an alternative site in the event of any disasters.

### **Investment Protection with Industry Standards**

Finally, IP PABX systems are designed to grow as and when required. The use of open standards also ensures an abundance of cost-effective IT resources are available at anytime.

“And as our business grows and expands into the region, we will be able to take advantage of IP PABX strongholds such as toll bypass. Other services such as Video-on-Demand services, web-conferencing and e-learning can be added as broadband line costs continue to drop,” said Mr Tan.

## NEXT STEPS

Like all other business, Abacus strives to increase profits by providing differentiated products and exceptional customer service. This needs to be balanced this with the often conflicting requirement of maintaining or lowering operational cost even as more products and services are introduced.

“The Cisco IP Telephony Solution is a cutting-edge enabler technology that will bring our business to the next level,” said Mr Tan. “We are very pleased with this first step into IP telephony. We have seen immediate productivity improvements and very useful new features such as hands-free, auto call-back, voicemail and caller ID. We look forward to tapping this system for even more returns in the future by developing and deploying new applications.”

Added Mr Tan, “IP telephony is definitely but the first step in many organizations’ long-term infrastructure plans towards a converged network. The benefits in cost savings, simplified administration and improved business productivity are clear. Abacus is leading the way for the travel industry and will act as the critical catalyst to spur faster adoption among its customers and partners.”

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Cisco transportation industry solutions, go to: [www.cisco.com/go/transportation](http://www.cisco.com/go/transportation)

To find out more about Cisco IP Communications solutions, go to: [www.cisco.com/go/ipc](http://www.cisco.com/go/ipc)

To find out more about Abacus, go to [www.abacus.com.sg](http://www.abacus.com.sg) and [www.abacus-travel.com](http://www.abacus-travel.com)



### Corporate Headquarters

Cisco Systems, Inc.  
170 West Tasman Drive  
San Jose, CA 95134-1706  
USA  
[www.cisco.com](http://www.cisco.com)  
Tel: 408 526-4000  
800 553-NETS (6387)  
Fax: 408 526-4100

### European Headquarters

Cisco Systems International BV  
Haarlerbergpark  
Haarlerbergweg 13-19  
1101 CH Amsterdam  
The Netherlands  
[www-europe.cisco.com](http://www-europe.cisco.com)  
Tel: 31 0 20 357 1000  
Fax: 31 0 20 357 1100

### Americas Headquarters

Cisco Systems, Inc.  
170 West Tasman Drive  
San Jose, CA 95134-1706  
USA  
[www.cisco.com](http://www.cisco.com)  
Tel: 408 526-7660  
Fax: 408 527-0883

### Asia Pacific Headquarters

Cisco Systems, Inc.  
168 Robinson Road  
#28-01 Capital Tower  
Singapore 068912  
[www.cisco.com](http://www.cisco.com)  
Tel: +65 6317 7777  
Fax: +65 6317 7799

Cisco Systems has more than 200 offices in the following countries and regions. Addresses, phone numbers, and fax numbers are listed on the Cisco Website at [www.cisco.com/go/offices](http://www.cisco.com/go/offices).

Argentina • Australia • Austria • Belgium • Brazil • Bulgaria • Canada • Chile • China PRC • Colombia • Costa Rica Croatia • Cyprus • Czech Republic • Denmark • Dubai, UAE • Finland • France • Germany • Greece • Hong Kong SAR • Hungary • India • Indonesia • Ireland • Israel • Italy • Japan • Korea • Luxembourg • Malaysia • Mexico • The Netherlands • New Zealand • Norway • Peru • Philippines • Poland • Portugal • Puerto Rico • Romania • Russia • Saudi Arabia • Scotland • Singapore • Slovakia • Slovenia • South Africa • Spain • Sweden • Switzerland • Taiwan • Thailand • Turkey Ukraine • United Kingdom • United States • Venezuela • Vietnam • Zimbabwe

Copyright © 2005 Cisco Systems, Inc. All rights reserved. CCSP, the Cisco Square Bridge logo, Follow Me Browsing, and StackWise are trademarks of Cisco Systems, Inc.; Changing the Way We Work, Live, Play, and Learn, and iQuick Study are service marks of Cisco Systems, Inc.; and Access Registrar, Aironet, ASIST, BPX, Catalyst, CCDA, CCDP, CCIE, CCIP, CCNA, CCNP, Cisco, the Cisco Certified Internetwork Expert logo, Cisco IOS, Cisco Press, Cisco Systems, Cisco Systems Capital, the Cisco Systems logo, Cisco Unity, Empowering the Internet Generation, Enterprise/Solver, EtherChannel, EtherFast, EtherSwitch, Fast Step, FormShare, GigaDrive, GigaStack, HomeLink, Internet Quotient, IOS, IP/TV, iQ Expertise, the iQ logo, iQ Net Readiness Scorecard, LightStream, Linksys, MeetingPlace, MGX, the Networkers logo, Networking Academy, Network Registrar, Packet, PIX, Post-Routing, Pre-Routing, ProConnect, RateMUX, ScriptShare, SlideCast, SMARTnet, StrataView Plus, SwitchProbe, TeleRouter, The Fastest Way to Increase Your Internet Quotient, TransPath, and VCO are registered trademarks of Cisco Systems, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and certain other countries.

All other trademarks mentioned in this document or Website are the property of their respective owners. The use of the word partner does not imply a partnership relationship between Cisco and any other company.