

Accenture Takes IP Telephony to the Cutting Edge.

Not content to be a follower, the Singapore office of this global consultancy set out to install the most cutting-edge—and the most cost-effective—telephone system it could find.

The Background

When the world's leading management and technology consultancy goes in search of a cutting-edge telephone system for a key regional office, it can expect that many other businesses will take notice of the outcome. That's reason enough to study Accenture's quest to identify such a system when it moved its Singapore headquarters last year.

Accenture has a long tradition of advising clients on technology that will offer both cost-effective and superior performance. With 75,000 professionals in 47 countries globally, the New York-based consultancy had revenues of more than \$11 billion in the fiscal year that ended August 31, 2001. Obviously, Accenture can't afford glitches in its own operations—not if it is going to credibly advise its thousands of clients.

That meant the pressure was on for the firm to devise a superior solution when it relocated its Singapore headquarters to the 42-story Raffles City Tower. It wouldn't be enough for Accenture to install a functional system. Its clients would expect Accenture to find a great solution to a problem they themselves faced routinely. Would the consultancy

embrace global best practices and practice what it preached?

"We saw the move as an opportunity," says Ramdan Pawi, a manager in Accenture's Singapore office. "We had three options: retain our existing Private Branch Exchange, adopt a pure IP [Internet Protocol] telephony solution, or use a hybrid."

The Challenge

Accenture is very much a company on the cutting edge of change. Its 400 consultants in Singapore spend much of their time in the field, and the company wanted to implement a workplace communications system in the new office that would allow individuals the freedom to pick the best available desk each day—a system in which desks would have no owners. The company needed a phone system that would support this flexibility.

The consultancy also wanted to leverage its considerable store of data knowledge, built up over decades of advising clients. The goal was similar to what so many companies are looking for: a reliable, cost-effective communications system that successfully combines voice and data networks through a single pipe. Installing

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separate backbones for each, which has been the typical solution for companies over the years, was needlessly complex and expensive to install and maintain.

To top it all off, the consultancy needed a system that would be intuitive to users. And the whole system had to be installed quickly. By the time Accenture reached a point where it could decide on its telephone system, the move, scheduled for late August, was just around the corner.

The Solution

Enter Cisco. Its IP telephony promised to achieve all of the company's goals and more. Based on open standards, the system would also permit flexible functionality that would be a noticeable improvement over Accenture's system in its old location. For example, the consultancy took advantage of the new system's open standards to develop a follow-me functionality that would be just the kind of service to impress existing and would-be customers.

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Moreover, the system's extension mobility could readily support an open office system that allowed employees to essentially treat the nearest desk and phone as their own. According to Ramdan Pawi, his company can now easily move phones without having to worry about changing cabling paths: "Phone moves are zero-cost."

Best of all, the whole thing could be set up quickly—more quickly than a conventional network with even a fraction of the IP telephony system's functionality. Cisco, its partner NCR, and Accenture's own global network services team installed the system in time for the big move.

Ng Mi Chi, territory account manager for Cisco in Singapore, says the Accenture system was designed to be extremely friendly to users. "The learning curve is very short," she says. "Everyone was able to step in with minimal training and use it. It's a very intuitive system."

The Results

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Accenture's Ramdan Pawi says Cisco IP telephony has brought numerous benefits to the consultancy. But he says the most



important may be its cost savings. After all, the consultancy often advises clients to choose effective and cost-efficient solutions to their problems. "There's an obvious cost benefit from providing a single cabling system that supports both voice and data—one less maintenance contract," he says.

Today Accenture touts the "cool technology" from Cisco on its Singapore Web site and notes that it has been able to get rid of its paging system entirely thanks to the follow-me functionality. The consultancy is understandably proud of the office environment it has created in Singapore, helping it achieve its goal of providing what it calls "the best place to work."

The Next Steps

Cisco believes it will be fascinating to watch as Accenture pushes the capabilities of IP telephony past new boundaries in the future. For example, Accenture may want to extend the system's capabilities to allow varied kinds of data exchange between employees. Unified messaging, which combines e-mail, voice mail, fax, and paging messages into a single application, is another likely goal.

Ng Mi Chi says it is the fact that Cisco's IP telephony runs on an open standards platform that truly makes functionality almost limitless—constrained mostly by the imagination of users. The use of open standards should also be great for companies in search of cost-effective solutions, because it encourages competition, and it opens the door to customized solutions.

Accenture Snapshot

- Management and technology services consultancy
- 75,000 employees in 110 offices spread over 47 countries around the world
- Spun off as a distinct and independent company from the Arthur Andersen accounting firm in 1989; rebranded as Accenture in 2001
- Singapore office is home base for more than 400 consultants



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