

Lion Nathan staff monitor and manage communications more efficiently with Cisco IP Telephony



Background

Lion Nathan is an Australian based alcoholic beverages company with operations in Australia, New Zealand and China. Its portfolio of beer brands includes Tooheys, XXXX, Hahn, West End, Emu, Swan, James Squire, Lion, Speights, Taihushui and Steinlager. It brews and distributes around 1 billion litres of beer annually.

In 2001, Lion Nathan began to build its global premium wine business through the acquisition of two of Australia's premium wine companies – Petaluma and Banksia. Its portfolio of premium wines which includes the Petaluma, Croser, Bridgewater Mill, Knappstein, Stonier, St. Halletts and Tatachilla brands are distributed domestically and exported.

In addition to its beer and wine businesses, Lion Nathan is involved in a number of related businesses in Australia and New Zealand. These include the distribution of licensed wine and spirits brands, the production and distribution of Ready-to-Drink beverages (RTDs), liquor retailing and malt extraction for home brewing and the food industry.

Challenge

In 2002, Lion Nathan was faced with the task of relocating their Auckland office, which supports more than 400 staff, to a new building, which would also be accommodating two other arms of the business.

As they were relocating, the company decided to review their IT&T infrastructure. Interested in the benefits of a converged network, they extensively researched the IP telephony approach with vendors, telecommunications companies and other corporations to determine the best possible solution for their workforce.

Lion already had 4-digit desk-to-desk extensions dialling, from anywhere in its network, and the same for the mobile phone network, but Internet Protocol (IP) carries it over the data network at a fraction of the cost.

In the end, the advantages of implementing IP telephony in the new building made the decision straightforward. Lion Nathan's Chief Information Officer, Darryl Warren said; "The existing PABX technology was 15 years old and had not been upgraded for many years, so the deployment of Cisco IP technology not only made logistical sense, it also provided a cost-effective and highly scalable foundation to meet our current and emerging communications needs."

A further consideration was that once investment in the core infrastructure was made, then being able to extend functionality to the company's other sites nationwide would mitigate the investment factor. IP telephony is very open-standards based, and subsequent technology additions that fit the user environment can be introduced very easily.

Solution

Enabled by Cisco Architecture for Voice, Video and Integrated Data (AVVID), the solution consolidates voice, video and data onto a single converged network to provide enterprise Lion Nathan with flexibility and productivity gains. In particular, it enables Lion Nathan staff greater autonomy to monitor and manage communications more efficiently.

The migration from legacy systems to Cisco IP telephony was conducted in conjunction with Cisco Systems integrator, Telecom New Zealand, and voicemail and contact centre application provider, Zeacom.

Lion tested the technology and ran a pilot system before making a final commitment. They chose not to migrate everything at once, preferring to undergo the learning curve on a smaller scale and deploy more extensively later on.

The IT move was large-scale, involving many data connections as both the computer room, and the call centre had to be relocated. Three technology systems had to be interlinked – the Mitel (the old call centre system), the NEC, and the Cisco environment. Testing was extensive and even included requirements that really pushed the technology, such as the Auckland-Sydney desktop synching.

Training sessions were run for staff so that they would be comfortable with the technology from day one and the feedback from people using the IP system has been extremely positive.

Lion's new building is now completely IP-capable, although the site has taken a progressive approach to applying the technology and therefore blends new digital and existing analog components.

Analog telephones plug into one of two devices – either a Cisco ATA, which uses a 2-port analog-to-IP connection at the user's desktop, or a 48-port analog-to-IP hub. This approach was cost-effective as it meant that Lion did not need to re-cable the telephony connections to every phone point in the business. The ATA or hub handles the digital transfer, and the Zeacom application interfaces the user and the IP system.

As the physical telephones work independently of the IP system, there is no impact to the user unless their desktop PC is running. Zeacom works by asking the user for their phone extension number and pin number, then provides full telephony control at the user's computer desktop. Those functions include: full screen service, voice mail control from the desktop, call forwarding, group favourites etc. In essence, staff can see the 'telephone' status of any one of the 400 users within the telephone network, eg. they will know if they are on a call, if they have switched calls to a new location, the number of voice mail messages they have etc.

The IP server that monitors the telephone status is integrated with another server that runs the voice mail component to the desktop connections. This lets users choose to have voice mail messages delivered to the email inbox on their desktop.

Results

Lion Nathan's IP telephony system is providing a much more flexible environment. The new technology fits in with the company's philosophy toward IT– with providers like Cisco developing products that can overlay desktop applications, the choice of what the desktop looks like, is going to largely rest with the user. Cisco has already deployed hands-free phone functionality in their high-end IP phones.

Cisco New Zealand Country Manager, Tim Hemingway said Cisco Architecture for Voice, Video and Integrated Data (AVVID) was the perfect solution for a global organisation such as Lion Nathan, as it brought ease of use, ubiquity and power of an Internet based voice solution into their business.

“Breaking apart the traditional telephony infrastructure improves communication and network efficiencies and also reduces operational costs,” Mr Hemingway said.

The IP system offers multiple options. In the future people on phones in Auckland can talk to colleagues in Australia basically for the cost of data collection. IP phones can have multiple 'parents' on the same number anywhere in the world, so one Manager has an Auckland phone and a Sydney phone which both ring simultaneously off the Auckland IP system. When travelling, the Cisco 'soft' phone running on the Manager's PC interlinks his number, which means when he is, for example in China, he can talk with Lion Nathan colleagues in Australia or New Zealand via his PC, or can use the PC as an IP phone.

Zeacom Marketing Manager, Mike Engle, said convergence is changing the way New Zealanders work. “Lion Nathan has an incredibly mobile workforce, with executives travelling internationally on a regular basis. Zeacom's Corus application is making it possible for Lion Nathan's staff to access voicemail and email all in one place, no matter where their business takes them,” Mr Engle said.

Lion is planning to migrate the IP system to its call centre, which already has the Zeacom product deployed on the NEC system, and digital NEC phones on the desktops in readiness. The company is also intending to extend local-dial IP access to its 30 Wellington-based staff, using the IP server in Auckland.

The IT team are very pleased with the performance of the technology, especially as some of the Cisco devices are very new – the ATA two-port analog devices had only been released to market six weeks earlier, and the 48-port analog hub device was only a few months old.

Partnerships

The IP telephony project was administered by a small IT team at Lion Nathan, in conjunction with three technology business partners: Cisco (the IP equipment provider), Telecom New Zealand, (the integration partner) and Zeacom (the desktop application provider).

Lion chose Cisco as its equipment partner because it already had a Cisco data network with routers and switches in various locations, but the big advantage was being able to leverage their product development knowledge. Lion appreciates that Cisco approaches the 'voice' technology platform from a 'data' perspective rather than from the 'voice' perspective ie. they extend the capabilities of their data equipment to include voice. In the case of Lion's Wellington office, a voice card need only be added to the router, with some extra memory, and it then becomes a gateway to the IP network – a technically easy solution, for a relatively modest investment.



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