

# TUI Belgium Distribution

## Saving with a centrally managed call centre infrastructure



“WHETHER THEY WORK FROM HOME, IN MECHELEN OR SHORTLY IN LEUVEN, OUR STAFF JUST HAVE TO TYPE IN THEIR USERNAME AND PASSWORD INTO THE TELEPHONE AND PC. THEN THEY HAVE ACCESS TO THEIR PERSONAL TELEPHONE CONNECTION, COMPUTER APPLICATIONS AND CALL CENTRE FUNCTIONS.”

Chris Schouten, technical ICT manager at TUI Belgium Distribution

Distribution, hotel chains, airlines, tour operator – the TUI Group is active in all aspects of the tourist sector and is the market leader in Europe. It is a division of the German group TUI that is listed on the stock exchange. With more than 860 staff and about 150 agencies, TUI Belgium’s distribution group is the most important travel agent in Belgium. Its two departments, known as TQ3 Travel Solutions and TUI TravelCenter, focus on selling a very wide range of business and holiday travel. TUI Belgium comprises the Ostend-based tour operator JetAir and the distribution group.

TUI Belgium was created out of a number of strategic partnerships and takeovers. The general services and call centres of the companies that together form the distribution group were centralised in 2002 in a new building in Mechelen. TUI used the move to develop a completely new telephony architecture for supporting the different departments of the call centre. Because they could start from scratch at the new location, the ICT department considered telephoning through the computer network from the start and they went looking for a suitable system.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### Background

With more than 860 staff and about 150 agencies, TUI Belgium’s distribution group is the most important travel agent in Belgium. Its two departments, known as TQ3 Travel Solutions and TUI TravelCenter, focus on selling a very broad range of business and holiday travel. Together with the Ostend-based tour operator JetAir, the distribution group forms the Belgian division of the international TUI Group.

#### Challenge

In 2002 the general services and call centres of the companies that together make up the distribution group were centralised in a new building in Mechelen. TUI used the move to develop a completely new telephony architecture for supporting the different departments of the call centre. From the start, the ICT department considered telephoning through the computer network.

#### Solution

TUI opted for Cisco’s IP Contact Centre (IPCC). In Mechelen a redundant infrastructure was installed based on the CallManager (Cisco’s IP switchboard), Cisco Unity voicemail, Cisco Intelligent Contact Management (ICM) for directing calls for the call centre, the automatic telephone answering machine Cisco Interactive Voice Response, some 300 Cisco 7940 and 7960 IP phones and three voice gateways for the link to the outside telephone network. Several teleworkers also have their own IP phones and they can use the infrastructure through the company’s wide area network (WAN).

#### Results

TUI Belgium’s distribution group now has an open and flexible call centre system that is managed internally and so saves annually a substantial amount on telephone costs. At any location where there is a PC, an IP telephone and a connection to the company network, staff members have access to the tools to do their job. From April 2003, the agency in Leuven has also will use the Cisco IPCC via the WAN. If the results are satisfactory, then in the future even more agencies will be connected to the infrastructure in Mechelen.

#### Internal management saves time and money

Chris Schouten, technical ICT manager at the distribution group, explains why: “Our old call centre was very expensive, with

regard to support as well as the leasing of the infrastructure. Moreover, it was not flexible. We had to call in the supplier for practically every modification or expansion. A call centre based on IP can



be managed internally. Not only does this work more smoothly, you also save money.”

TUI assessed seven systems from various suppliers and opted for Cisco's IP Contact Centre (IPCC), the most open system. “Cisco truly offers a novel solution that is fully based on IP. Such a system allows you to do further development internally and to integrate products from other ICT suppliers as necessary. All the other proposals included an offering that was based on existing traditional telephony switches that had been adapted for supporting IP telephony. So you stay tied to your supplier for hardware, software and support. That was exactly what we didn't want,” says Chris Schouten about their choice.

Chris Schouten denies that IP telephony is expensive to purchase: “The proposals for implementing our installation, which has about a couple of hundred users, did not really differ that much with regard to costs. When you start with the construction of a new development, you can save on cabling and installation costs by converging speech and data. What is more, we didn't have an old network infrastructure that had to be adapted.”

However, it is more important that the total cost of ownership with IP telephony is lower than with a traditional system. Thanks to the new installation, the distribution group spends annually a substantially smaller amount on telephony. The internal management of the telephony and the call centre is the most important savings item. Adding telephones, changing a number, developing new scripts for the call centre; from now on Dirk Levens, ICT enterprise administrator business & IP telephony, does it himself: “I was present during the configuration of the entire system and that was actually my basic training. Since then I have explored the system further. Once you're used to the procedures, it's fairly simple to work with them.” It is also quicker to make modifications to the system now because there is no external party involved. TUI uses a partner only for more sizeable installations, such as in Leuven.

#### **Affordable redundancy**

In collaborating with the integration specialist Telindus and the call centre specialist Bucher & Suter, a completely redundant telephony and call centre infrastructure was installed in the office in Mechelen. “That is also an advantage of IP telephony and voice-over-IP. You can afford redundancy and so guarantee a permanent telephone connection,” adds Dirk Levens. “The telephones are connected to a UPS via the inline power panels, so if there is a power failure we can still make calls.”

The CallManager, Cisco's IP switchboard, now directs TUI's telephone traffic. For voicemail Cisco Unity is used. Cisco's Intelligent Contact Management (ICM) forms the heart of the call centre and ensures that calls go to the right agent. Cisco Interactive Voice Response, the automatic telephone answering machine, takes care of callers who are not yet clients and directs them – based on selected language for instance – to the person who can help them. The link with the outside telephone network is through two gateways to four PRIs ((Primary Rate Interface, a set of 30+1 ISDN lines). Two SIM boxes are connected to a third gateway in order to keep down the cost of calls from certain numbers to mobile numbers.

In total some 300 staff, of whom 120 are call centre agents, now make calls through the company's computer network. For this they use Cisco 7940 and 7960 IP telephones. These have an internal switch, so that in the new building only one socket per desk was needed to connect both the telephone and the PC to the network. “Installing such a socket costs 75 euros. Not a huge amount in itself, but multiply this by a couple of hundred desks and you will understand you save quite a bit of time and money,” according to Chris Schouten.

#### **Working at home like at the office**

The use of IP telephony and IPCC at the TUI Belgium distribution group is not confined to the building in Mechelen. All the distribution group's offices and teleworkers are connected with each other via BiLAN, Belgacom's data network that can also carry phone calls. So teleworkers can use the telephone and call centre infrastructure. Through their computer and IP phone they have the same functions and applications at home as at the office and they automatically receive their calls through the company network.

According to Chris Schouten and Dirk Levens, the biggest advantage of the new infrastructure is flexibility. Thanks to the convergence of data and speech in a single network, staff members have access to the tools to do their job at any location where there is a PC, an IP phone and a connection to the company network. “Our staff just have to type in their username and password into the telephone and PC and they have access to their personal telephone connection, computer applications and call centre functions. It does not matter whether they work from home, in Mechelen or shortly in Leuven. We actually created a virtual office and call centre,” says Chris Schouten.

Because the staff members log on again each day, the system knows exactly who is in. In the call centre this is important for business travel, for instance, as each customer has its personal agent. If that person is not available when the customer rings, then the ICM automatically directs the call to a replacement.



### One system for all branches

From April 2003, the first agency also will be using the IPCC infrastructure. The staff in Leuven are being brought together in a new building and through BiLAN they are have access to the IP switchboard and call centre applications in Mechelen.

TUI Belgium's distribution group is not just saving on equipment in this way. The management of the entire system and the development of scripts for the call centre are also centralised.

Chris Schouten: "We are treating Leuven as a test case. It is a fairly sizeable office compared with the others. If the results of this connection are satisfactory, more agencies will use the infrastructure in Mechelen in the future. Most of our offices have only two to four staff. Some work with outdated switchboards. If these fail it is much more economical to offer the agency a telephone and call centre connection via the WAN than installing a new traditional switchboard."



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