

Employment Firm Improves Communications and Productivity

Converged network helps Human Potential Consulting increase staff productivity and customer responsiveness

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HUMAN POTENTIAL CONSULTING, LLC

- Employment services
- Carson, California
- 34 employees

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Increase staff productivity to keep pace with expansion in services and contract awards
- Improve responsiveness to customers
- Attract more job candidates and screen applications faster

NETWORK SOLUTION

- IP-based phone system adds capacity and productivity-enhancing communications features
- Firewall protection secures connection to Web-based online recruiting application
- Integrated services router for call processing, security, and high-performance switching meets current and evolving business needs

BUSINESS RESULTS

- New IP phone system increases staff productivity
- Features, such as conferencing and direct individual extensions, make it easier for customers and staff to connect
- Local-area network allows project teams to share documents

Business Challenge

Human Potential Consulting (HPC), based in California, was founded in 1997 to provide a second chance for the jobless. Cofounder, president, and CEO Garnett Newcombe recognized the “human potential” in people facing extraordinary challenges in obtaining employment, including disabilities, age, lack of work experience, and criminal records. Newcombe’s vision for HPC was to become the premier minority, woman-owned employment services company serving federal, state, and local government and Fortune 500 companies.

Within a few short years, HPC grew from 2 employees to 12 permanent and 22 contract employees, and expanded its services into three areas: project management, staff placement, and staff and management development. Recently the company has won high-visibility contracts from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations and the California Access to Recovery Effort Program.

Because HPC is an employment services company, contract awards dictate where most of its staff is based. As HPC won more contracts, its staff became more spread out across the state of California, with some contracts being handled out of another office in Detroit. With continued growth in services, staff, and locations, staying connected became an increasing challenge. According to Deidre Norville, director of operations and management at HPC, “We had virtually no network infrastructure to support our growth. Only one person had e-mail, we had a dialup connection to the Internet, and none of our desktops were connected to a local-area network.” In addition, the company’s main business communications tool, its phone system, was painfully limited in both capacity and features.

The lack of connectivity and the inadequate communications system began to have a worrisome impact on everything from staff morale to customer perceptions. “We started to see that contractors working at remote sites could easily become isolated and even demoralized,” says Newcombe, “and staff productivity and customer responsiveness suffered from the lack of shared access to

information and a high-quality phone system. Technology wasn't really part of our plans in the past, but we knew it was vital to our future success."

Network Solution

In 2006, Newcombe was one of 20 women entrepreneurs recognized by Count Me In's national "Make Mine a \$Million Business" program to foster women-owned businesses. Cisco®, the program's network technology sponsor, awarded HPC a Cisco Smart Business Communications package designed and deployed by CPI, a Cisco channel partner.

Following the principles of the Cisco Smart Business Roadmap, a guide to technology planning and implementation, Marty Sarkisian and Ishmael Shabazz of CPI began working with HPC to lay out a technology plan that would support HPC's business goals for growth, connectivity among staff, and improved responsiveness to customers.

The new HPC network is based on a Cisco 2800 Series Integrated Services Router and Cisco Unified IP Phones. "HPC's existing phone system was clearly inadequate," says Sarkisian. "There were too few outbound and inbound lines, no way to tell when a line was in use, no one had a direct extension, and people were constantly running from desk to desk because there was no way to transfer calls." A converged network and IP phone system gave HPC the productivity features the company needed, with scalability for the future. The modular Cisco router incorporates Cisco Unified CallManager Express which handles call processing for the Cisco Unified IP Phones, as well as a high-performance LAN switch.

Before winning the Cisco award, HPC had upgraded from a dialup modem to a DSL connection, and it used its hosted Website, www.hpcemployment.org, to post jobs and accept applications. However, its DSL connection had no security, leaving the company unprotected from the Internet. Shabazz used the built-in Cisco IOS® Firewall on the Cisco router to secure HPC's Internet connection. "From talking to HPC about their long-term business plans, we knew that they would need more remote access capabilities in the future," says Shabazz, "so it was important to deploy a foundation that would allow them to add more connectivity securely."

"Taking the time to build a strong technology foundation is one of the best moves we've made as a small business."

Much of HPC's business involves large, multiyear contracts that can dictate an expansion in staff and office space virtually overnight. In the middle of planning for its new technology infrastructure, HPC won a major government contract and needed to move to new headquarters. "We had carefully worked out all of the telephone features that we wanted for our new Cisco phone system," says Norville, "and now we had to make sure that the transition to the new system, in the middle of a move, was as transparent as possible to our employees."

CPI worked with HPC's IT consultant to plan the wiring for the new office space so that employees could just plug in and start using their new IP phones. "We moved in with the old phones, but simply switched them out when the new phones arrived," says Norville. "The way that CPI planned the cutover was excellent, and it all went like clockwork. Our staff never missed a beat with work, and they loved the new phones from the start."

Business Results

The new technology infrastructure has supported HPC's ability to capitalize on business opportunities in more ways than Newcombe ever imagined. The new phone system has not just added more phone lines, "it has dramatically improved the productivity of our employees," she states. "When I walk around the office, I can see that employees are spending more time working and less time trying to track down colleagues to tell them they have a call. We can now initiate ad hoc conference calls with remote staff or customers from any phone. I've also noticed how seemingly small things can make a difference in how people feel about their jobs, like giving each person his or her own extension. I would estimate that staff productivity has increased by 65%."

PRODUCT LIST

Routing and Switching

- Cisco 2800 Series Integrated Services Router with integrated Layer 3 Ethernet switch
- VLANs

Security and VPN

- Router-based encryption, VPN support, Network Admission Control, intrusion prevention, Cisco IOS Firewall, and VPNs

Voice and IP Communications

- Cisco Unified CallManager Express
- Cisco Unity® Express
- Cisco Unified IP Phone 7960G

Newcombe herself feels as though she has more time to spend out in the community. "I can be out of the office promoting the company, attracting job applicants, and winning new business. Taking the time to build a strong technology foundation is one of the best moves we've made as a small business."

For the first time, HPC has the ability to network all the desktops on the headquarters LAN to give employees access to company information. The company plans to capitalize on this capability to support an important new contract from the Social Security Administration (SSA). The new LAN will enable HPC to give the four-

person SSA project team highly secure, shared access to all project information on a common server. With the VPN connectivity built into the router software, HPC will be able to extend this ability to allow more remote workers to securely access project or company information from remote sites.

NEXT STEPS

The Cisco network has helped HPC accelerate its business immediately, with tremendous flexibility and capacity for sustained growth. With one network, the company can support voice, data, video, wireless, security, and beyond. "It's very exciting to know that we can continue to add employees and customers for years to come without outgrowing our phone system, and that we can add video conferencing so easily to help us stay connected to remote staff," says Newcombe.

Newcombe just became HPC's first mobile worker, with her new laptop computer, but she knows she won't be the last. "In the future, I expect that more of our staff will be connecting securely from remote sites through our Cisco network."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Cisco's Smart Business Communications and Smart Business Roadmap, go to www.cisco.com/go/smb and www.cisco.com/go/sbr.

For more information on Count Me In, go to www.countmein.org



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