



SUCCESS STORY

Events Management Firm Gains a Competitive Advantage

Meeting Consultants uses integrated Cisco Unified Communications and IBM Lotus solutions to enable employees to collaborate with each other and partners in any location.

Executive Summary Meeting Consultants

Event Planning and Meeting Management
Atlanta, Georgia

Business Challenge

- Gain a competitive advantage
- Improve productivity
- Increase market share
- Reduce costs

Solution

- Replaced PBX system with Cisco Unified Communications Manager, integrating it with Lotus Sametime instant messaging software
- Deployed Cisco Unified Contact Center Express, integrating it with Lotus Domino database
- Integrated Cisco Unity Unified Messaging with Lotus Notes email

Business Results

- Delivered an outstanding contact center experience
- Reduced facilities and communications costs by US\$150,000 annually
- Enabled real-time, instant communications with top customers

Business Challenge

When companies stage large events such as business and sales meetings, trade shows, or incentive trips, they can save time and money by engaging Meeting Consultants for planning and onsite event management. With offices in Atlanta, Georgia and Boca Raton, Florida, the company has 50 employees and full-time contractors who manage events throughout the United States, Europe, and Singapore.

Efficient communications and collaboration are vital in the fast-paced events management industry. For large events, Meeting Consultants employees bring the contact center with them so that attendees can quickly resolve issues regarding registration, hotel accommodations, billing, and more. "The more efficiently we can resolve attendees' issues, the better we make our customers look," says Casey Cote, president of Meeting Consultants.

Meeting Consultants had already provided its employees with leading collaboration tools: IBM Lotus® Sametime® for instant messaging, Lotus Notes® for email, and Lotus Domino® for event databases. But the company had separate private branch exchange (PBX) and voicemail systems in each of its offices, and employees managed two voicemail accounts, for office phone and cell phone. "We wanted a more integrated communications and collaboration environment, to gain a competitive advantage," Cote says. "Our goals were to provide a superior customer experience in our contact center, and to enable our employees to collaborate anytime, from any workspace, including home or an event venue."

Solution

Meeting Consultants met its goals with an integrated Cisco® and IBM solution. "We chose Cisco Unified Communications largely because of the IBM and Cisco Alliance," says Cote. "The integration between our Lotus solutions and Cisco Unified Communications enhances collaboration and saves time. In addition, Cisco Unified Communications has the scalability and reliability that we need for a business-critical communications platform."

Faster call-handling gives us a competitive advantage in attracting and keeping customers and also improves employee productivity.

Redundant Cisco Unified Communications Manager and Cisco Unity® Unified Messaging servers in the Atlanta office have replaced the old PBX and voicemail systems. The Boca Raton office no longer needs its own equipment, and instead uses a Cisco Integrated Services Router to receive voice and voicemail services over the network. Employees who work from home can securely use the same voice and voicemail services that they would have in the office using a Cisco Unified IP phone or Cisco IP Communicator software on their laptop, and a Cisco Adaptive Security Appliance 5505 or 5510. Employees take advantage of the Cisco Unified Mobility feature to make calls to their office phones also ring their cell phones or home phones.

To integrate Cisco Unified Communications with its existing Lotus solutions, Meeting Consultants engaged Softchoice, a value-added reseller for Cisco and IBM solutions. "We fully deployed Cisco Unified Communications and integrated it with the existing Lotus solutions over a single weekend," says Marcus Owens, account executive, Softchoice. "It took so little time because Cisco and IBM have already integrated their solutions: Cisco IP telephony with Lotus Sametime, Cisco Unity Unified Messaging with Lotus Notes, and Cisco Unified Contact Center Express with Lotus Domino."

The integration has transformed customer interactions. For example, suppose an event attendee calls with a last-minute request for a hotel room. Cisco Unified Contact Center Express routes the call to an agent, who simultaneously receives

a screen pop with relevant information from the Lotus database, based on the number that the customer is calling from, calling to, or the registration number they entered. "The integration between Cisco Unified Contact Center Express and Lotus Domino reduces call-handling time because agents don't have to ask for information that's already available," says Cote.

When the customer makes a request, the agent can use Lotus Sametime instant messaging to contact the hotel manager for an immediate response, while the customer is still on the phone. An agent who wants to escalate the chat session into a phone call over the Cisco network can simply click in the Lotus Sametime window, and even conference in the customer.

Softchoice added the Lotus Sametime Gateway so that Meeting Consultants employees can chat with people in other organizations, such as hotels providing event accommodations, using Lotus Sametime or any other popular instant messaging client.

Results

The integrated products from Cisco and IBM provide a complete Unified Communications and Collaboration solution for Meeting Consultants, helping give them a competitive advantage.

Superior Customer Experience

Customers that stage large events typically want Meeting Consultants to provide full contact center support for the 30 to 60 days preceding and during the event. The integrated Cisco and

Lotus solutions speed up call handling and enable customer service agents to resolve customer issues while the customer is on the phone instead of transferring them or calling back later. "We've received emails from our customers' customers, complimenting agents on how quickly they resolved an issue," Cote says. "Faster call-handling gives us a competitive advantage in attracting and keeping customers and also improves employee productivity."

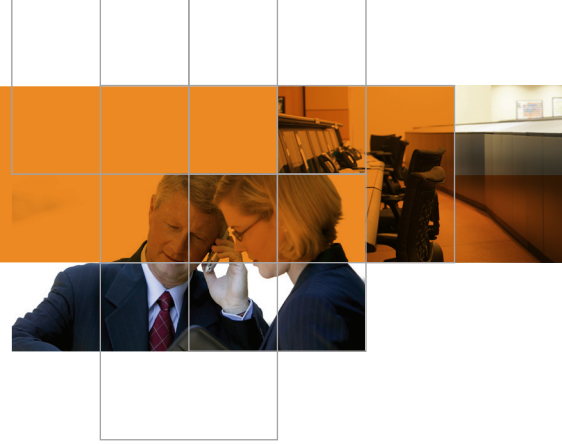
Increased Responsiveness

Integration between Cisco Unity Unified Messaging and Lotus Notes enables employees to play back and manage their voicemail from their email inbox, forward voicemail messages as email attachments, and save the time that they used to spend checking messages in two places.

Cost Savings

Unified Communications and Collaboration Solutions from Cisco and IBM have reduced Meeting Consultants' costs in the following ways:

- *Lower operating and capital costs:* IBM and Cisco Unified Communications and Collaboration Solutions have reduced facilities and communications costs by about US\$150,000 annually. The savings result from not having to add more office space, eliminating telephone circuits to employees' home offices, lowering maintenance costs, and eliminating long-distance fees for calls between Meeting Consultants' offices and home offices.



- *Reduced staffing requirements:* The company no longer needs a receptionist to answer and transfer all calls because Cisco Unified Communications Manager supports direct dial numbers.
- *Faster awareness of need to cancel hotel reservations:* If event attendees call at the end of the business day to cancel a hotel reservation, Meeting Consultants become aware of the message right away because customer service agents can now work on site, in the same time zone.
- *Cost avoidance for new office space:* By enabling employees to work productively from home, Meeting Consultants will avoid or postpone adding new office space. "Our fully burdened cost for employees is 175 percent of salary," says Cote. "The multiplier decreases when we eliminate the need for office space, associated utilities, and furniture."

Increased Employee Satisfaction

Previously, Meeting Consultants could only receive calls in its Atlanta office, which meant that employees had to stay late or start early to answer phones for events in other time zones. Now, with Cisco Unified Contact Center Express, agents can work in any location with a network connection, including the event venue, with just a Cisco Unified IP phone or Cisco IP Communicator integrated with Lotus Sametime client.

More than half of the company's employees now work from home, and most of the rest work from home two or three days a week. They have all the collaboration tools that they would have in the office, and no

longer need an expensive leased line. "We have great employee retention, and part of the reason is the option to work from home, which improves quality of life and keeps our employees happy and productive," says Cote. Employees also like the savings in fuel costs and their reduced carbon footprint.

Business Continuity

When Meeting Consultants could only answer calls from the office, inclement weather could effectively close the business. Now employees can make and receive calls, manage voicemail, and conduct Lotus Sametime chats from home just as if they were in the office. Customers call the same number and see the same number on their caller ID.

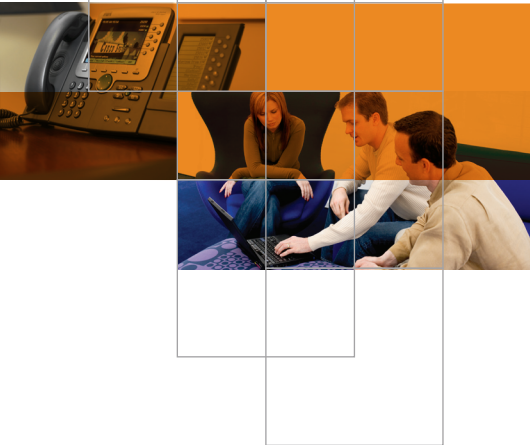
Next Steps

Meeting Consultants plans to increase the value of its investment in Cisco Unified Communications by adding new services. One plan is to add a click-to-chat option on event websites, using Lotus Notes services. Cisco Unified Contact Center Express can intelligently route these requests to a qualified agent, who will respond using Lotus Sametime.

Another plan is to offer a self-service contact center for companies that cannot cost-justify a full contact center service. Softchoice is developing the self-service application using Cisco Unified Contact Center Express interactive voice response (IVR) capabilities and integration with Lotus Domino. Callers will be able to make everyday inquiries such as confirming registration information, checking accommodations, or requesting a duplicate receipt.

"We chose Cisco Unified Communications largely because of the IBM and Cisco Alliance. The integration between our IBM Lotus solutions and Cisco Unified Communications enhances collaboration and saves time."

**Casey Cote
President,
Meeting Consultants**



Product List

Cisco Unified Communications

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager 7.0
- Cisco Unified IP Phones 7942, 7962, 7970
- Cisco IP Communicator
- Cisco Unity Unified Messaging
- Cisco Unified Contact Center Express

IBM

- Lotus Sametime
- Lotus Sametime Gateway
- Lotus Notes
- Lotus Domino

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Communications go to:
www.cisco.com/go/unifiedcommunications.

To find out more about the Cisco and IBM Alliance go to:
www.cisco.com/go/ibm
www.ibm.com/cisco.



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