

Lumber Products Company Builds Communications Infrastructure

Great Southern Wood Preserving unifies sites with Cisco Unified Communications and Cisco wireless network from SMB Partner TekLinks.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
<p>GREAT SOUTHERN WOOD PRESERVING, INC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction/building materials • Abbeville, Alabama, USA • 790 employees
<p>BUSINESS CHALLENGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve communications among separate sites and plants by providing standards and improved phone system features • Needed to implement affordable video conferencing solution
<p>NETWORK SOLUTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated network foundation to support unified communications and future applications • Deployed wireless network solution for improved inventory process
<p>BUSINESS RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four-digit dialing drives productivity by unifying disparate company sites and facilities • Easy expansion of existing network to add new applications such as a wireless mesh network and video conferencing • IT staff freed up to focus on strategic projects

Business Challenge

Great Southern Wood Preserving, Inc. produces a full-range of pressure-treated lumber products for a variety of uses, and also distributes building supply products such as composite decking. Headquartered in Abbeville, Alabama, Great Southern Wood has offices and plants throughout the southern United States. Although it's a leading provider in its market, the company's 790 employees were using disparate, out-dated phone systems that lacked many of today's features.

"Like many other medium-sized businesses we evolved from a small business and our network and communications evolved as well," says Chris Godwin, IT director for Great Southern Wood. "We were not standardized and the IT staff was spending a lot of time troubleshooting the network and the various phone systems."

The company's seven plants in four states all had different phone systems, and this situation often interfered with communication more than facilitated it. Wanting a solution with modern communication features that would facilitate employee productivity, Godwin researched updating the entire network infrastructure, including the phone system. And with the wide geographical range of their different sites, he also wanted the option to add video conferencing.

Through the local Cisco office he found Cisco Gold Certified Partner TekLinks, located in Birmingham. As a Cisco SMB Select Partner, TekLinks has focused on the local small and medium-sized business market since its inception, and has solid expertise in IP technology and IP communications.

"Our typical client is less than one thousand employees," says Doug Pass, corporate account manager for TekLinks. "We have engaged with Cisco in some really successful joint marketing efforts including seminars, mailings and lead generation events. These have really helped us further reach out to the SMB community. Today we're considered the 'go-to' partner in the state of Alabama for network infrastructure and IP technology."

Network Solution

TekLinks' Senior Systems Engineer Jeremy Sanders met with Godwin and the Great Southern Wood IT team and found that they had a good idea of what they wanted: a network infrastructure to support the company's current and future technology needs, and which would support future applications such as wireless and video conferencing. It was also important that Great Southern Wood be able to manage the network itself.



TekLinks started with a high level, company-wide network analysis to assess existing technology, and determine necessary upgrades to support a new solution.

The TekLinks team recommended a best-practices Cisco Unified Communications solution, including Cisco Unified Communications Manager, Cisco Unity and Cisco Unified Survivable Remote Site Telephony. A new Cisco Catalyst switch would provide the necessary boost in network infrastructure. The solution was designed to deliver an easily-managed network with built-in reliability and scalability. The management at Great Southern Wood didn't need much convincing.

“The manageability of our whole network and communications solution is a huge improvement for us—I can't even put a price on that. Employee moves, adds and changes are really easy, and that time-savings equals dollars for the company. By standardizing on Cisco we can, for the first time, deliver standardized features to everyone in the company.”

—Chris Godwin, IT Director, Great Southern Wood

“The strong support provided by Cisco was a big factor in our final decision,” says Godwin. “And the scalability and performance of a Cisco solution is better than anything else available. The solution will also facilitate big time savings because of its easy manageability.” For instance, the time Godwin's team used to spend on moves, adds, and changes could be devoted to more strategic projects, meaning saved dollars and higher IT productivity. Additionally, the company

found the standalone video conferencing solutions to be quite expensive. So when it considered how Cisco Unified Communications could support video conferencing, it actually decreased the cost of deploying IP communications.

Pass says the overall deployment was remarkably smooth given the implementation at eight different sites, each with its own connectivity and network requirements. Rather than overload his small IT staff with a fast company-wide deployment, Godwin chose a gradual rollout to all of the sites over six months. TekLinks used its IP communications technology expertise to integrate Cisco Unified Communications with the old phone systems. Teklinks' network analysis continued on a more granular level at each site, taking lessons learned from each deployment and applying them to the next deployment.

"During the entire implementation, our users experienced no downtime with the network or with their phone communications," says Jason Lawler, Network Administrator for Great Southern Wood. "I think that is pretty amazing, and I attribute it to TekLinks. It was a very easy transition." Training was in place for the receptionist at the headquarters building and other administrative workers as they switched from analog phones to the Cisco Unified IP phones. For the rest of the employees, about 30 per plant, the Cisco Unified IP Phones were installed and Godwin and his team would show them how to dial out and set up their voicemail. Ultimately, more than 350 Cisco Unified IP Phones 7940G were deployed.

The deployment was so successful that Great Southern Wood wanted to take advantage of wireless capabilities right away. TekLinks designed and deployed a Cisco wireless network solution featuring Cisco Aironet 1510 Lightweight Outdoor Mesh Access Points to improve inventory control and product movement in the company's warehouse and distribution sites.

Business Results

With Cisco Unified Communications now deployed at all Great Southern Wood's sites, and a Cisco Unified Wireless Network at work in the company's warehouse, Godwin is convinced that the scalability and performance of the Cisco solution is better than anything else available. He says the phones are crystal clear and simple to use, and that the company is saving dollars on interoffice calls and dial-in features.

PRODUCT LIST

Cisco Unified Communications including:

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager
- Cisco Unity
- Cisco Unified Survivable Remote Site Telephony
- Cisco Catalyst 3550 and 3560
- Cisco Unified IP Phones 7940G and Cisco Unified IP Conference Stations 7936
- Cisco Aironet 1510 Lightweight Outdoor Mesh Access Points

"The four-digit dialing saves time and unifies the company," he says. "Another employee may be three states away, but with four-digit dialing it's like they're in the same building." He believes the employees most appreciate the integration of voicemail and email with Cisco Unity, particularly how they can easily forward messages and add a note. The mobility of the Cisco Unified IP Phones is also a big plus because an employee who needs to work at another site simply takes their phone with

them and plugs it in at the new location. The Cisco Unified IP Phone can find the network, and the phone has the employee's regular extension, settings and preferences, all without involvement from the IT department.

“The manageability of our whole network and communications solution is a huge improvement for us—I can’t even put a price on that,” says Godwin. “Employee moves, adds and changes are really easy, and that time-savings equals dollars for the company. By standardizing on Cisco we can, for the first time, deliver standardized features to everyone in the company.”

For Godwin, the most exciting part of the deployment is that it has enabled Great Southern Wood to take ownership of its network.

“They wanted a network they could manage themselves, and Cisco technology gives them that,” says Pass. “They received training and educated themselves, and we provide only high-level support. It’s a great partner/customer relationship.”

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Communications and Cisco Wireless Network, go to: <http://www.cisco.com>. For more information on Cisco Partner Teklinks, go to <http://www.teklinks.com>.



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