

Produce Importer Keeps Pace with Fast-Moving Marketplace

Fresh Direct Produce workforce is more mobile, responsive with Cisco Unified Communications.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
FRESH DIRECT PRODUCE LTD. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industry: Produce Import and Distribution Location: Vancouver, BC Number of Employees: 100 employees
CHALLENGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay competitive in fast-moving industry by improving employee accessibility and responsiveness
RESULTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intelligent phone system improves employee accessibility and boosts efficiency Secure wireless network enhances mobility
SOLUTION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cisco Unified Communications solution delivers secure voice, data, and wireless communication throughout the firm

Challenge

Fresh Direct Produce prides itself on providing its customers the most delicious fruits and vegetables that the world has to offer. Based in Vancouver, B.C., Fresh Direct is a leading importer and distributor of more than 400 high-quality produce items from 25 countries around the globe. The firm serves a diversified base of customers across Canada including chain stores, food service distributors, wholesalers, and independent grocers.

To power this global business, Fresh Direct relies on rapid communication with suppliers, business partners, and customers. Produce is a perishable product, and market conditions can change in an instant, so speed is critical to success.

“The produce market can change in hours or even minutes,” says Davis Yung, president of Fresh Direct Produce. “Prices are constantly changing, based on market conditions like weather, production, demand, currency exchange, and other factors, so rapid communication is essential for us. We need to make decisions in seconds when we know that the market is going up or coming down.”

As Fresh Direct grew, the company found that its network and phone system could no longer keep up with its fast-paced business operations. The voice and data network had been assembled from several different products, and was cumbersome to manage and update. The company had no wireless networking capabilities, and its call management features were also limited, making it difficult to reach a highly mobile workforce.

“We have a lot of sales and buying staff who are always on the road,” says Yung. “Our phone system offered only basic call forwarding, which sometimes slowed communications.”

The aging phone system also hampered the company’s ability to support growth, which created serious strategic planning issues. To make changes to the system, the company had to contact an expensive outside vendor.

“We want to expand our company to other cities around the country,” says Yung. “We needed a scalable platform that could help us build the business out over the long term, so we began to explore several technology options.”

Results

To give its employees the immediate, direct communications that the business required, Fresh Direct replaced its phone system with the Cisco® Unified Communications System. The Cisco solution supports all of the company’s voice, data, and wireless communications on one secure network. Its intelligent call-handling features make communication fast and simple, improving the company’s efficiency and productivity.

“The Cisco communications system makes it easy to reach employees by dialing one phone extension,” says Justin Mak, system administrator at Fresh Direct. “If I don’t answer the call at my desk, the system will automatically forward the call to me at my cell phone, or on to my home phone. This is a big help, because I can give just one phone number to vendors, customers, and internal staff. I don’t have to ask a client to keep track of three or four different numbers.”

“The single-number-reach feature improves the service level for our sales staff,” adds Yung. “Now they are much more accessible and responsive than before.”

The new Cisco network improves communication not only at the Fresh Direct office, but for employees who are working from home or on the road.

“One of the solution’s best features was the Cisco Unified Personal Communicator soft phone that we have installed on our laptops,” says Yung. “Eight members of our team recently attended a trade show in Toronto, and we were able to stay in constant touch with our main office, clients, and suppliers the entire time. With the Cisco solution, I can just dial an extension from my laptop and reach anyone in the company or hold a quick meeting. That helps us a great deal in terms of reaction time and ability to deal with issues.”

Warehouse operations are a critical part of the Fresh Direct business, so the company added Cisco Wireless LAN Controllers and Access Points for secure wireless voice and data networking.

“We had to use a paging system to reach warehouse employees in the past,” says Yung. “It can be difficult for customers and staff to hear one another in the coolers. Now we can actually reach a specific person very quickly, and get a response,” says Yung. “Every year we handle 6 million cases of produce. It’s a very fast paced environment, and our wireless capability gives us the communication tools we need to keep up. We are also considering applying the wireless network to support barcode systems for inventory control.”

Managing and maintaining the solution is much simpler than before, because Cisco Unified Communications provides plug-and-play support for phones and other network devices.

“In the past, if we had to add a phone for a new employee, we would have to call a technician from the phone company, and pay additional charges for any modification to the system,” says Yung. “The Cisco Unified Communications solution has helped us save time and money on basic network changes.”

Solution

Working with Cisco Gold Certified Partner UNIS LUMIN, Fresh Direct installed the Cisco MCS 7828-I3 Unified Communications Manager Business Edition. This server appliance is preinstalled with Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition 6.0 software. The solution delivers powerful phone features that help employees spend less time tracking down one another, and more time working together.

“Our solution includes an up-to-date company directory, so anyone with a Cisco IP phone can touch a few buttons to search for employees by name, and reach the person they need to talk to,” says Mak. “We don’t have to memorize extensions anymore.”

“The system is very self-explanatory and user-friendly,” adds Yung. “For example, if I’m on the phone with a colleague, I can press a few buttons and conference in other members of the team on the spur of the moment. And our salespeople love the system’s ability to display missed calls. Even if a customer has not left a message, we can see that they have phoned and get back to them right away.”

Safeguarding sensitive business information was an important priority for Fresh Direct, so the company added the Cisco ASA 5510 Series Adaptive Security Appliance for firewall protection.

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– Davis Yung, President, Fresh Direct Produce

“The produce industry is an extremely competitive one, so internal security is a must,” says Mak. “The Cisco firewall gives us the ability to allow only authorized users to access our network.”

To keep the solution running at its best, Fresh Direct signed up for the Cisco SMARTnet[®] Service. This award-winning technical support service offers direct, anytime access to Cisco engineers and an extensive range of technical resources.

“So far our Cisco solution has been extremely stable, and we have not had to escalate any issues,” says Yung. “If we have a problem with configuration or other issues, we can call SMARTnet, and an engineer can sort things out very quickly.”

Next Steps

With its new voice and data network in place, Fresh Direct is already making plans to take advantage of new features that the platform can offer.

PRODUCT LIST

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager Business Edition
- Cisco Unified IP Phones 7900 Series
- Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phones 7921G
- Cisco 3500 Series Catalyst[®] Switches
- Cisco 2800 Series Integrated Services Router
- Cisco Wireless LAN Controller

“We are exploring unified communications that will convert voicemails to email attachments, for easier message management,” says Yung.

“We anticipate that the feature will provide some benefits in making our employees easier to reach.”

Fresh Direct is also discussing ways to expand its business to additional locations. Fortunately, Cisco Unified Communications was designed to help growing businesses take on new challenges as their needs evolve.

“Opening new offices is part of our strategic plan,” says Yung. “We started our company more than six years ago with ten people, and now we have consolidated our operations into a 55,000-square-foot warehouse. Within a year or two, we will have one or two more offices, and we are confident that the Cisco solution gives us a good foundation to support this growth.”

For More Information

To learn more about the Cisco solution, visit www.cisco.com/smallbusiness or contact your authorized Cisco salesperson.



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