



INNOVATIVE BIOTECHNOLOGY COMPANY

OPTS FOR IP COMMUNICATIONS

«IP COMMUNICATIONS OFFERS SEVERAL ADVANTAGES FOR ANY ENTERPRISE, EVEN SMALL TO MIDSIZE BUSINESSES. IF YOU ASK ME, THE TRADITIONAL PBX CONCEPT NO LONGER HAS A FUTURE. FOR THE SAME REASON AT DEVGEN, AS A FUTURE-ORIENTED, INNOVATIVE COMPANY, WE WANTED TO INVEST IN COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY THAT BEST FIT OUR OVERALL OUTLOOK. AS FAR AS OUR COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK IS CONCERNED, WE ARE NOW COMPLETELY READY FOR THE FUTURE, WHICH ALLOWS US TO BE ON THE BALL, 100% OF THE TIME.»

Henk De Jonghe, IT Director, Devgen

With only around one hundred employees, the biotechnology company Devgen, established in 1997, is not a huge enterprise. Nevertheless, ICT is absolutely indispensable to its operations. State-of-the-art technology is essential to the company's ground-breaking research. It is therefore a conscious decision of Devgen's to continue to work with future-oriented technologies.

In 2004, Devgen moved from its original location to a new building approximately 300m up the road in the same Ghent technology park. The move provided the occasion to invest in new communications technology.

DON'T INVEST IN OUT-DATED TECHNOLOGY

«We started out with eight employees at our first location, an existing university building. The building was equipped with a classic telecommunications installation. In the meantime, our staff register has grown to more than 100 and we now have a second office in Singapore. When we moved our headquarters to a new building we had custom built to our size and specific needs, we also decided to stop investing in out-dated communications technology. We immediately took steps to allow for the installation of IP communications,» says Henk De Jonghe, IT Director at Devgen.

Devgen already had some experience with Cisco's network and security technology. That said, the company did not automatically opt for Cisco's IP communication systems but first compared Cisco's offer with that from other suppliers. «It soon became obvious that Cisco could offer us the best solution at an attractive price,» says De Jonghe.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Established in 1997, Devgen is a Belgian innovative biotechnology firm focusing on the discovery, development and commercialisation of new biotechnological products ranging from safer, more environmentally friendly agrochemicals designed to protect agricultural crops against pests, to new therapeutic concepts for the treatment of infections and diseases such as diabetes, obesity and heart conditions. All these activities are supported by an internally developed platform of research and development programmes and technologies.

Devgen has forged collaborative links with leading players in the biotechnology and agrochemicals industry. The firm was founded in 1997, has offices in Ghent and Singapore and totals more than 100 employees.

CHALLENGE

ICT is very important to a biotechnology firm such as Devgen, where it plays a central role in the strategic and managerial aspects of the company's operations. State-of-the-art technology is indispensable to the company's research. In addition, Devgen currently has a second location in Singapore, making communication between the two establishments of principal importance. Within the organisation itself, scientists are regularly on the move, to another department or another office depending on the project's evolution. On top of all that, as an innovative, stock exchange listed company, Devgen has to be able to react quickly to change. Such a company cannot afford an ICT system forming an obstacle to its successful operation. Therefore, the company's recent move from its former headquarters to a new building formed the perfect opportunity for Devgen to invest in future-oriented communications technology.

SOLUTION

Devgen installed 100 Cisco IP telephones and an IP PBX, the Cisco CallManager. With the aid of Cisco and its partner company, Belgacom, Devgen pitched in for a significant proportion of the installation itself. As a result, it is now also in a position to solve any eventual problems without outside assistance. The technology is integrated with Microsoft Outlook so that users can make calls directly from their contacts list in Outlook.

RESULTS

Cisco's IP technology turned out to be so user-friendly that neither the IT technicians nor the end users needed very much training. The end users are able to perform a number of tasks intuitively, such as the configuration of their own device. When a staff member is transferred to another department, everything runs smoothly: the respective employee simply takes his device with him thus preserving all personalised settings. Given that voice traffic now runs on the computer network, the IT department now only has to manage one communications layer. That saves them a significant amount of time and resources. In conclusion, the network is now not only more efficient to manage, it is also easier to secure and simpler to expand.





HARDLY ANY TRAINING NEEDED

Devgen installed around 100 of Cisco's IP communications devices and replaced the traditional PBX with Cisco's CallManager. The latter is based on Internet Protocol (IP) so that voice traffic, just like data traffic, can run on the backbone of the computer network. One single CallManager can service up to 2500 telephones at various locations around the world. Devgen therefore only needed to install one CallManager for both of its establishments. The office in Singapore is connected with the head office via VPN.

When the Singapore offices are soon equipped with IP telecom as well, the telephone bills will in any case come down dramatically.

«We ended up implementing a lot of the project ourselves with the help of Cisco and their local partner, Belgacom. As a result, we were able to compile the necessary knowledge of the technology ourselves in order to solve most potential difficulties without outside help. Our end users are also able to perform a number of tasks themselves such as forwarding calls from their device or configuring it via the internet browser. Cisco's technology is, in other words, very user-friendly. Even organised training sessions were not really necessary either for the IT technicians or the end users, but were nevertheless put in place for the sake of completeness. We are also very pleased with the technology's integration with Outlook, which means we can make calls directly from our Outlook contacts list,» says De Jonghe.

MORE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT AND SECURITY

For Devgen's IT technicians, the switch to Cisco's IP technology has brought real improvements. Seeing as voice traffic now makes use of the computer network, they only have to manage one communications layer. They no longer need to keep up to date with two separate technologies. As a result, the network is much easier and faster, and therefore cheaper, to manage. Network security is now also much simpler and more efficient. «All this means that our investment will pay for itself in just three years time,» says De Jonghe.

With classic telecommunications installations, the number of connected devices is often strictly limited by the capacities (the number of ports) of the PBX. To connect additional devices requires extra ports on the PBX. That can lead to problems when companies want to expand. Installing such a classic telephone network is also an expensive exercise given the separate cabling required. As a result, it is often the case that not all offices enjoy the same capabilities. The distribution of services is therefore often very complex for the systems administrator. This is not the case with IP communications: once the communications application has been installed on the IP PBX, every department can access it. Every employee has access to the same services and applications. The systems administrator, furthermore, can clearly see which telecom capabilities and services are active in each office.





MOVING AND EXPANDING WITHOUT PROBLEMS

In the event Devgen were to open new offices or employ new staff members, the extra IP devices required can simply be connected via the company network to the existing Cisco CallManager. The systems administrator need not even intervene in the process. «Even if our employees change departments internally, we don't have to make any complicated changes. They simply take their communications device with them, connect it to the network at their new work station and have immediate access to the same functions they used before,» says De Jonghe. With a classic PBX, the device would have to be re-programmed or re-patched. In the event of expansion, that would also have meant installing additional equipment.

IP COMMUNICATIONS FOR SMALL TO MIDSIZE BUSINESS

«IP communications can offer several advantages such as lower costs and simpler management for any enterprise, even small to midsize businesses. If you ask me, the traditional PBX concept no longer has a future. For the same reason at Devgen, as a future-oriented, innovative company, we wanted to invest in communications technology that best fit our overall outlook. As far as our communications network is concerned, we are now completely ready for the future, which allows us to be on the ball, 100% of the time. That is no superfluous luxury for a fast-growing stock exchange listed company in an innovative sector such as ours,» concludes Henk De Jonghe.

