

Distributor Improves Customer Service with Faster Answers

Cross Company employees use Unified Personal Communicator to see if experts are available before transferring customer calls.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
<p>CROSS COMPANY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Engineering and Distribution • Greensboro, North Carolina • 210 employees
<p>CHALLENGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance customer service • Help employees get answers more quickly • Unify communications across 12 locations
<p>SOLUTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidated all branches onto a single unified communications system • Provided presence information, so that employees can see if their co-workers are available • Gave employees one interface for all their communications tools
<p>RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made it easier for customers and employees to reach the right person, the first time • Enabled employees to work productively from any workspace, including home

Challenge

Cross Company distributes and customizes hydraulic, pneumatic, instrumentation, and automation systems and components for customers in the southeastern United States. The company has 12 locations and 210 employees. Cross previously maintained separate private branch exchange (PBX) systems in each location, which only provided headquarters and one branch office with voicemail. That meant that customers who called branch offices sometimes had to be transferred multiple times before finally reaching someone who was available. Cross decided to make a change when maintenance costs for the aging PBX systems began increasing. “Our corporate management team directed the IT group to look at the company’s long-term needs for communication and collaboration rather than simply replacing the voice system,” says David Routh, director of information systems, Cross Company.

“We concluded that we needed a communications solution that would unify our 12 locations into a single campus.”

The main goal for the new communications system was to help customers as well as employees reach each other on the right device, the first time. This solution would improve the customer experience and therefore strengthen loyalty. For example, customer service would improve if employees knew that a co-worker was available to pick up the phone before transferring a call.

“With information available from Presence, employees can see whether their co-workers are available before transferring a call, so customers can talk to a live person instead of having to leave a voicemail.”

—David Routh, Information Systems Director, Cross Company

It would be even better if employees could use instant messaging to get answers from experts who were currently on the phone. Then the company could close sales during the phone call instead of making the customer wait for a call back, and potentially call a competitor. Cross Company asked Dimension Data, a Cisco® Certified Gold Partner, to help plan, build, and support a new communications system.

Solution

Dimension Data along with Cross IT staff planned, designed, and installed the Cisco Unified Communications solution. Cross Company had also considered another vendor's communications solution. "After Dimension Data reviewed the differences, we chose the Cisco Unified Communications because we could deploy it centrally rather than installing and maintaining equipment in each of our offices," says Routh. All of the Cisco Unified Communications servers are deployed in the headquarters' data center and deliver services to the branches over the network. "A centralized deployment simplifies upgrades, which is important to us because we have a relatively small IT staff," Routh says. Cross already had a Cisco network and using the network as the platform for communications would simplify management. "Cross Company was refreshing its Cisco network infrastructure anyway, and it made good business sense for them to add unified communications at the same time," says Fielder. "Using one network for voice and data reduces its equipment and operational costs."

"Presence has been even more useful than I expected. When I'm helping someone on the phone and need an answer, I can immediately see which expert is available and then send an instant message."

—Nathan Brown, Network Administrator, Cross Company

Results

With Cisco Unified Communications, all 12 Cross Company offices share the same dial plan. Employees can transfer calls to any branch, and employees can view real-time Presence information to see which co-workers are available and how they prefer to be reached: phone, video, email, or instant message.

Connecting Employees

All 140 headquarters and branch office employees use Cisco Unified Personal Communicator, a desktop application that integrates all of the company's communications tools, including instant messaging, an employee directory, call lists, video, unified messaging, and Presence information. "Presence has been even more useful than I expected," says Nathan Brown, network administrator, Cross Company. "When I'm helping someone on the phone and need an answer, I can immediately see which expert is available and then send an instant message."

Serving Customers Better

Customers now have a much easier time reaching Cross Company employees, strengthening the customer relationship. One reason is that each employee now has a direct-inward-dial (DID) phone number and unified messaging. Another reason is that customers who call the wrong branch (a common occurrence because the company has multiple divisions) can be transferred instead of

being asked to hang up and call another number. “With information available from Presence, employees can see whether their co-workers are available before transferring a call, so customers can talk to a live person instead of having to leave a voicemail,” says Routh. When employees are not available, they can use the Automated Attendant to direct their calls to a general delivery voice mailbox.

“Previously, if our credit department’s line was busy, a customer who wanted to make a purchase had to wait until the credit coordinator was free, perhaps for five minutes or more. Now the salesperson can simply send an instant message and get an immediate response. The benefits are better customer satisfaction and shorter wait times for the other customers in the store.”

—Rob Hogg, Network Administrator, Cross Company

Service in the company’s retail stores is faster, as well, because salespeople can get credit approval even if the headquarters employee who gives the approval is on the phone. “Previously, if our credit department’s line was busy, a customer who wanted to make a purchase had to wait until the credit coordinator was free, perhaps five minutes or more,” says Robb Hogg, network administrator, Cross Company. “Now the salesperson can simply send an instant message and get an immediate response. The benefits are better customer satisfaction and shorter wait times for the other customers in the store.”

“Using one network for voice and data reduces [Cross Company’s] equipment and operational costs.”

—David Fielder, Senior Engineer, Dimension Data

Working from Any Workspace

Employees can now be reached from anywhere with a network connection as easily as if they were working in the office. Some employees work from home using a Cisco Unified IP Phone or Cisco Unified Personal Communicator and VPN software. The work-at-home option enhances employee satisfaction and potentially helps the company reduce its carbon footprint. Outside salespeople and mobile IT staff members can be reached at the same number from any location with a network connection (office, customer location, hotel, or airport), making them more responsive using the Cisco IP Communicator softphone on their laptops.

Simplifying Maintenance and Support

Cross Company’s two IT support personnel, who did not have previous experience with voice systems, perform day-to-day management tasks. If a problem arises that cannot be resolved in-house, Cross Company uses Dimension Data’s Uptime Support service, which provides dedicated staff to resolve any issues. “The centralized unified communications system also makes it easier for Cross Company to open new offices as the business grows,” says David Fielder, senior engineer,

Dimension Data.

Next Steps

Now that the Cisco foundation is in place, Dimension Data is working with Cross Company to use the network as the platform for additional unified communications applications. Plans include:

PRODUCT LIST
<p>Routing and Switching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco 3825 Series Integrated Services Routers • Cisco 2811 Series Integrated Services Routers • Cisco Catalyst 3560 Switches <p>Voice and Unified Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco Unified Communications Manager • Cisco Unified IP Phones 7941G, 7961G • Cisco Unified Personal Communicator • Cisco IP Communicator • Cisco Unified Presence Server • Cisco Unity Unified Messaging

- Adding videoconferencing capabilities so that employees can collaborate more effectively and view the equipment as they discuss it.
- Setting up processes for telecommuters. Office employees and telecommuters will be able to see each other's Presence information.
- Providing Cisco Unified Personal Communicator to outside sales reps. "If a customer calls an inside salesperson, the inside salesperson will be able to check to find an outside sales person who is currently available, and add them to the conference

with a single click," says Routh. Inside and outside sales reps will also be able to communicate efficiently with instant messaging to provide better customer service and potentially increase sales.

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Communications go to: <http://www.cisco.com/go/uc>.



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