



Unified Communications Brings Greater Efficiencies and Cost-Savings to Catapult Systems

Catapult leverages Microsoft's Unified Communications platform

Background

Over a year ago, faced with an aging phone system, expiring leases and six offices to support, Catapult Systems needed a new, corporate-wide communications solution. While in the process of sending out voice over internet protocol (VoIP) proposal requests to the leading voice/data providers, Catapult discovered Microsoft's "VoIP as You Are" approach, which enables companies to retain their existing hardware including legacy routers, gateways, PBXs and phones.

"We were intrigued by this option," said Joe Stocker, Catapult's Director of IT. "With over 240 employees we needed a corporatwide telephony solution that would give us greater efficiencies and some cost savings, while simplifying the overall management of our system. Microsoft's "VoIP As You Are" approach was the most compelling choice. It was significantly lower cost than other vendors and, we felt, a unique approach. The use of a media gateway integrates Office Communication Server (OCS) with the existing phone system so you can keep the hardware investment you've made, but get all of the other benefits of unified communications (UC)."

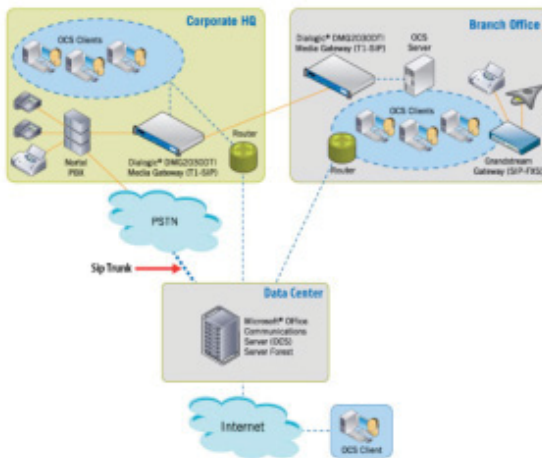
Implementation

As Catapult began to implement the "VoIP As You Are" approach, it found that there would be less maintenance costs if the private branch exchanges (PBXs) were eliminated and replaced with gateways. "We were spending about \$16,000 per year in PBX maintenance costs," said Stocker. "Replacing them with primary rate interface (PRI) to session initiation protocol (SIP) gateways freed up considerable cost; so much so that we'll pay for the gateways in one year alone." Catapult also found that the gateways enabled it to use Exchange Server for voicemail, which turned out to be a significant benefit because it no longer had to support individual voicemail systems at each office.

Gateways at the local offices provided the best call experience for back-office employees who rarely traveled. However, Catapult turned to SIP trunking to enable its mobile workforce to connect directly to the outside from anywhere in the world. "We added a SIP trunk to our data center so our consultants could have the best call experience while they worked from client locations or home," shared Stocker. "This eliminated the extra hop from the data center to the gateway in the branch

office so they could place calls directly through our data center where bandwidth was more plentiful. And, we could also issue local phone numbers to each consultant. The SIP trunk did not require a gateway because OCS 2007 R2 now supports native SIP trunking.”

Another unexpected advantage was the ease of implementing the UC solution. After the first implementation in Austin, Stocker found that each satellite office took only about eight hours to fully install and test. “I flew into Dallas in around 9:30 a.m. and left at 5:30 p.m.,” said Stocker. “During that time I accomplished configuration of the gateway, OCS mediation server, and FSX device to provide the analog integration for fax and conference phones, as well as end user training.”



With the UC solution in place for all of Catapult’s employees, focus was put upon not only rapid adoption, but user satisfaction. “Interestingly enough,” said Stocker, “we found that one of the primary factors in user satisfaction was finding the right headset for each person. We spent a great deal of time researching the available options, testing them out and getting feedback to ensure we could offer options that met people’s needs

and comfort levels.” The effort paid off; a recent survey of Catapult’s employees demonstrated a 95% satisfaction rating of the UC solution. “People are empowered because their voicemail is now accessible on mobile devices via Outlook Web Access and email,” shared Stocker. “They can now just click on a number in Outlook contacts to call someone, and phone tag is significantly reduced because presence enables them to see if someone’s available. People can really communicate now so much more effectively.”

Challenges

However, implementing UC did not come without its challenges. “We had to overcome a learning curve so we could interface with phone systems and analog equipment,” said Stocker. “We literally had to learn a new language so we could speak intelligently with carriers, phone vendors and telecom analysts. One of the things we learned was that older phone systems can be replaced with PRI to SIP gateways, and OCS can become a software-powered VoIP phone system when paired with SIP trunking. But, the underlying network needs to be analyzed to make sure it has adequate bandwidth for VoIP too.”

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Benefits

While employees are reaping the benefits of an integrated UC solution, Catapult has realized significant cost savings. Before UC, Catapult was spending more than \$16,000 per month for its phone/data lines, data center, conference calls, long-distance, phone lease, and third-party vendors to service PBX equipment. Today that cost has been reduced to just \$6,000 per month. In all, Catapult projects a cost savings of nearly \$300,000 over the next three years. "This is one of the few technologies in this economic climate that is a no-brainer," said Stocker. "We've gained numerous benefits from implementing this solution. For instance we can now take advantage of our data network so calls can be placed as local calls instead of long-distance. And, new audio bridge capabilities in OCS enabled us to host our own conference bridge, which saves us at least \$2,000 a month."

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Catapult has also seen significant reduction in travel costs. In the past, it hosted an annual off-site meeting for its consultants; this year each office connected into a hosted live meeting with webcams, saving nearly \$60,000 in travel costs.

Other benefits included:

- Reduced cell phone bills.
- Reduced long-distance costs with toll bypass.
- Reduced PBX maintenance at Catapult's headquarters.
- Elimination of PBX maintenance at branch offices.
- Elimination of "physical" phones in all of Catapult's cubicles.
- A highly mobile workforce that can make & receive calls anywhere (office, client, home).
- Notification of missed calls and voice mails in an email inbox, including email-enabled cell phones.
- Complete log of all calls and voicemails forever.
- Centralized IT can now perform all add/moves/changes with familiar Active Directory and Exchange tools.
- Drag & drop call transfer & conferencing.
- Ability to "see" who is on a conference call.
- Ability to escalate from instant messaging, to desktop sharing, to a UC call in just a few clicks.