

Entertainment Technology Firm Increases Speed of Communications

Production Resource Group LLC is upgrading to Unified Communications Manager 7.0 and adding Unified Mobile Communicator so that customers can reach mobile employees in any workspace.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PRODUCTION RESOURCE GROUP LLC

- Entertainment Technology
- New Windsor, New York
- 1300 employees

CHALLENGE

- Increase responsiveness to customers
- Increase effectiveness of mobile employees
- Reduce communications costs

SOLUTION

- Replaced disparate PBX systems with Cisco Unified Communications
- Upgrading to Cisco Unified Communications Manager 7.0 to enhance mobility

RESULTS

- Increased speed of communications with mobile employees
- Enabled employees to work productively from home
- Saved US\$420,000 annually

Challenge

When you attend a concert, Broadway play, convention, or trade show, your experience includes myriad behind-the-scene elements such as the stage, scenery, lighting, audio, and video. Bringing these elements together is the specialty of Production Resource Group LLC (PRG), which has 22 offices in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Japan.

Being accessible to customers is essential in an industry where months or years of planning might culminate in a single one-hour show. If a lighting change is needed at the last minute, for example, the customer does not have 20 minutes to wait for a response to a voicemail message.

To meet its customers' high expectations, PRG needed an advanced unified communications platform. The firm had grown by acquisition and found itself with multiple private branch exchange (PBX) systems from different vendors. Employees could not reach their global counterparts with four-digit dialing, long-distance phone costs were higher than the company would like, and managing the disparate systems was time-consuming. "Our executives wanted to modernize our communications processes, both internally and with customers," says Ian Smith, director of information technology for PRG. "Success in our industry depends on strong customer relationships."

PRG wanted a unified communications platform that would pay for itself through direct cost savings on leased lines, toll costs, and voice and web conferencing service bureau fees. The platform would also need to improve the speed of communications, especially for the company's mobile employees. PRG sales associates, for example, serve as the single point of contact for designers, producers, electricians, and others. "Our customer's requirements can change in an instant, and they need to be able to reach sales associates no matter where they are, which is often not at their desk," says Smith. "When we respond to a call from an anxious customer right away, the conversation is more likely to be productive."

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—Ian Smith, Director of Information Technology, Production Resource Group LLC

Solution

PRG performed a detailed return on investment (ROI) analysis, comparing traditional telephony to unified communications. “Our analysis showed that we could just manage to pay for a unified communications system from the cost savings from toll charges, leased lines, and long-distance consolidation,” says Smith. “The ROI got a lot better once we added conferencing and mobility, which would reduce large expenditures for voice and web conferencing. And we knew that we would benefit from transformations to our business processes that would make us more efficient, productive, and responsive to customers and coworkers.”

PRG compared unified communications solutions from Cisco and other leading vendors. “We chose Cisco Unified Communications largely because the suite of integrated applications provides most of the capabilities that we need so that we don’t have to purchase and manage a lot of third-party products,” Smith says. “In addition, our IT group can manage the system using the many of the same skills that we already use to manage our Cisco data network.”

PRG decided to deploy Cisco® Unified Communications as soon as possible to begin saving US\$21,000 annually on leased lines. In 2007, PRG deployed Cisco Unified Communications 5.0, Cisco Unified MeetingPlace® for voice, video, and web conferencing; Cisco Unified Presence; and Cisco Unified Videoconferencing. Just a few months later, PRG upgraded to Cisco Unified Communications Manager 6.1.

With the built-in Cisco Unified Mobility single-number reach feature, PRG employees’ coworkers and customers can dial just one number to reach them on their desktop phone or mobile phone. Calls that are not answered are directed to the Cisco Unity® office voicemail system so that employees only need to manage one voicemail account.

In 2008, to make it even easier for customers to reach mobile employees, PRG upgraded to Cisco Unified Communications System Release 7.0. “One of our main motivations for upgrading to Cisco Unified Communications Manager 7.0 is to use Cisco Unified Mobile Communicator, enabling mobile employees to use their smartphone in many of the same ways that they use their desktop phone,” says Smith. Now PRG employees can:

- Receive notification on their smartphones when they receive new office voicemail messages
- Click to hear messages in any order, avoiding the delays if they had to dial into voicemail to check for messages
- Use their mobile phones to dial from a corporate directory and click to join Cisco Unified MeetingPlace conferences.

Executives, sales associates, and office personnel use Cisco Unified Personal Communicator, a desktop application for PC or Mac that provides a unified interface for commonly used unified communications capabilities such as voice, instant messaging, presence, voice messaging, click to

call, video, conferencing, corporate directory, and call history. “Executives who work in different global offices just bring their PCs with them and can immediately access their Cisco Unified Communications applications with a single log in,” says Smith.

Employees can work from home using Cisco Unified Personal Communicator with a Cisco Adaptive Security Appliance or Cisco VPN Client software, accessing the same voice services that they would have at the office. The ability to work effectively from home helps increase employee productivity, contributes to enhanced job satisfaction, and reduces carbon emissions.

“Our customers like the fact that their sales associates will either take the call or be alerted to the voicemail message right away, no matter where they are. This strengthens the customer relationship.”

—Ian Smith, Director of Information Technology, Production Resource Group LLC

Results

Increased Responsiveness

Before PRG began using Cisco Unified Mobility and Cisco Unified Mobile Communicator, customers sometimes had a difficult time reaching their sales associate on the first call. If they reached voicemail, they often asked the operator to page the employee or try the mobile number.

Now, with Cisco Unified Mobility, a call to the sales associate’s desktop phone simultaneously rings the mobile phone. And if the account executive cannot answer immediately, notification of the new office voicemail message appears right on the smartphone. “Our customers like the fact that their sales associates will either take the call or be alerted to the voicemail message right away, no matter where they are,” Smith says.

Lower Costs

Cisco Unified Communications saves US\$420,000 annually:

- Conferencing: By conducting company voice and web conference calls and project team meetings over the company network with an on-premises Cisco Unified MeetingPlace solution, PRG is saving US\$360,000 annually in service bureau fees.
- Leased lines: PRG can connect its smaller offices using Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) lines instead of analog or ISDN lines because of the E164 dialing support (“plus” dialing) in Cisco Unified Communications Manager 7.0. The firm is saving US\$250 monthly for each of seven offices, for annual savings of US\$21,000.
- Reduced management requirements: “We now support just one platform, Cisco Unified Communications, instead of more than ten disparate PBX systems,” says Smith.
- Less expense for videoconferencing: PRG no longer needs separate ISDN lines for videoconferencing. Instead, voice, video, and data all travel over the same Cisco network.

Next Steps

PRG plans to use the network as the platform for additional capabilities to increase efficiency and responsiveness:

- A new disaster recovery strategy will avoid any disruption if an office's system or telecommunications network fails. "Routing calls through another office is much easier than ever before because Cisco Unified Communications Manager 7.0 requires fewer route patterns," Smith says.
- The home office communications experience will become identical to the regular office experience. PRG plans to use the Cisco Adaptive Security Appliance Phone Proxy feature in Cisco Unified Communications Manager 7.0 for employees who work from home. Employees will be able to use all of the communications capabilities that they would have in their office with only a Cisco Unified IP Phone and their existing router.
- Cisco TelePresence rooms in different global offices will enable face-to-face collaboration among company executives without the time, costs, and environmental impact of travel.

Smith concludes, "We have advanced to the forefront of our industry in communications technology and strategy, making it easier for employees do their jobs and providing differentiated service to our customers."

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Communications go to:

www.cisco.com/go/unifiedcommunications

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