

Production Studio Provides Tenants with Fast, Flexible Communications

Albuquerque Studios rapidly provisions custom voice services to multiple tenants using Unified Communications.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALBUQUERQUE STUDIOS

- Multimedia production
- Albuquerque, New Mexico
- 75 employees

CHALLENGE

- Provide differentiated service to tenants
- Contain network costs
- Earn incremental revenue

SOLUTION

- Deployed a Cisco Unified Communications solution
- Integrated with third-party usage-tracking software

RESULTS

- Gained competitive advantage by delivering personalized voice services
- Reduced network management staffing requirements
- Increased service revenue

Challenge

Albuquerque Studios is a \$91.4 million, 28-acre, full-service motion picture and television production facility in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Reputation matters in the close-knit production industry, and Albuquerque Studios differentiates itself by providing outstanding service. “Every TV or feature film production is a startup business,” says Nick Smerigan, chief operating officer. “The most essential service the production team needs on the first day is the voice system.” Clients often have individual requirements for routing and forwarding calls. “When we provision voice services, the client might tell us, ‘By the way, the art department needs to be located away from the noise of the stage, and their calls need to be routed through the switchboard,’” says Jeremy Hariton, executive director.

Also, the number of phones needed fluctuates during the course of a production. “It is not uncommon for a team to increase in size from 17 to 28 employees, then to 60, then to 100, and then back down to 17 when the production is wrapped,” Hariton says. Traditional private

branch exchange (PBX) systems do not provide the flexibility that Albuquerque Studios requires.



Albuquerque Studios knew its choice of voice system would have a big impact. “The 150 people who are producing a TV show or feature film will soon split up, often after four to six months, and join other TV shows,” says Smerigan. “When they do, they will freely share their experience with their previous studio. Service is the only thing we can sell that differentiates us from other studios, and the communications system is the most visible part of our service.” The communications system would also affect revenue, because the revenue model for production studios is similar to that of hotels. “We rent space, but our profitability depends on the services we provide, including voice and data services,” Smerigan says. “To earn revenue, we need the ability to capture usage information for voice services, including phones, voicemail boxes, and additional lines.”

Solution

Albuquerque Studios approached InterNetwork Experts, Inc. (INX), a Cisco® Certified Gold Partner, for help designing and deploying a voice and data network. “When the Albuquerque Studios management team explained the business model, we realized that they operate in a dynamic multi-tenant unit [MTU] environment similar to that of multi-tenant office buildings,” says Jeff Nash, account executive with INX. “They needed security, rapid provisioning, and the ability to segment the network for each customer, all capabilities that are superior with an IP-based voice system.” After INX demonstrated the Cisco Unified Communications solution and compared it to the voice and data systems the executives had used at their previous studio, Albuquerque Studios immediately recognized the business value.

INX provided a turnkey solution for consulting, design, implementation, and support. Redundant Cisco Unified Communications Manager servers, which provide support for Session Initiation Protocol (SIP), reside in the studio’s data center. Tenants receive Cisco Unified IP Phones, which they can connect in any location in the studio. A Cisco Emergency Responder server automatically updates a central database with the phone’s new location so that callers’ precise locations can be identified when they dial 911.

For conferencing, which is popular in the film production industry, Albuquerque Studios uses Cisco Unified MeetingPlace Express. Tenants can easily schedule a voice or web conference from Microsoft Outlook, or else initiate a spontaneous conference. Some sound stages are equipped with Cisco wireless access points so that production executives can use enter a password on their laptops to access the Internet and email without returning to their desks. The studio uses Avotus Intelligent Communications Management call-accounting software, which integrates with Cisco Unified Communications Manager, to track voice, conferencing, and wireless usage so that customers can be accurately billed.

To protect the privacy of each production company’s information as it travels over the Cisco network, Albuquerque Studios set up separate VLANs for each production company renting space, each VLAN with its own firewall services.

Results

Service Flexibility, for a Competitive Advantage

Albuquerque Studios can quickly add or remove phone extensions as its customers’ productions scale up or down, improving customer service. To provision new handsets, Albuquerque Studios simply adds the user’s information on the phone, which takes only five minutes. Tenants can freely move their phones to other locations without any involvement from Albuquerque Studios. “A production executive can bring a Cisco Unified IP Phone to the sound stage and simply plug it in,” says Smerigan.



The flexibility creates a competitive advantage. “Cisco Unified Communications enables Albuquerque Studios to quickly and inexpensively accommodate any technical requirements that their customers mandate,” says Nash.

The Cisco system also gives Albuquerque Studios flexibility as it grows. Rather than purchase a separate Cisco Unified Communications Manager server for the additional buildings, the studio will deliver telephony services over the network from the centralized Cisco Unified Communications Manager servers, which can support up to 5000 phones. If the link to the main building should become unavailable, the Cisco router in the building can use the Cisco Unified Survivable Remote Site Telephony feature to temporarily route calls over the public switched telephone network.

Reduced Costs

Building a converged network for voice and data rather than separate networks significantly reduced construction costs. For example, each desk needs only a single network connection instead of separate connections for voice and data, saving approximately US\$150 to \$250 for each desk, or US \$50,000 for 200 phones. Ongoing operational costs are lower as well, because fewer IT staff are needed to maintain a converged voice-and-data network than separate networks.

Increased Revenues

Integrated Avotus ICM software enables Albuquerque Studios to track each tenant’s communications usage, including Internet, local and long-distance calling, conferencing, wireless access, and VPN connectivity. “We anticipate that voice and data services will be among our best profit centers,” says Smerigan. He notes that traditionally, studios delegated services such as voice, lighting, and air conditioning to service providers. If something went wrong, however, customers still had to pay the studio for the stage, resulting in uncertainty about who was liable for the charge. “The new model is for the studio to provide all services, including voice, so that we can provide a better customer experience,” says Smerigan.

Single-Vendor Support

Rather than working with multiple vendors for voice, data, voicemail, conferencing, and other services, the Albuquerque Studios IT group can work with just one vendor, Cisco. This reduces the complexity of the voice system, simplifies integration, and accelerates issue resolution.

“Service is the only thing we can sell that differentiates us from other studios, and the communications system is the most visible part of our service.”

—Nick Smerigan, Chief Operating Officer, Albuquerque Studios

Next Steps

During phase two of construction, will double in size. The studio can provide voice services for the new buildings’ long-term tenants, who are expected to include talent agencies and post-production facilities. Cisco Unified Communications can scale to accommodate the studio’s aggressive growth. “With Cisco Unified Communications, we can maintain control of the voice system and its quality for everyone we invite on the lot,” says Hariton. Albuquerque Studios also plans to begin offering its tenants a paging service based on Singlewire Software’s Informacast, which sends audio or text messages to Cisco Unified IP Phones.

Smerigan concludes, “Cisco Unified Communications gives us the flexibility to meet our customers’ varying business needs, as well as fast provisioning, expandability, and control over a significant revenue source. It is a good choice for our business model.”

For More Information

To learn more about Cisco Unified Communications, visit: www.cisco.com/go/unifiedcommunications.

To share best practices and unfiltered perspectives, engage with customers and other experts on the Collaboration Community from Cisco at www.cisco.com/go/joinconversation.

PRODUCT LIST

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Catalyst® 6500 Series Switches with Firewall Services Module
- Cisco Catalyst 4948 Switches
- Cisco Adaptive Security Appliance (ASA) 5500
- Cisco VG248 Analog Phone Gateways
- Cisco 3750 Series Switches with Power over Ethernet (PoE)
- Unified Communications

Cisco Unified Communications Manager

- Cisco Unified MeetingPlace Express
- Cisco Unity® Connection
- Cisco Unified IP Phones 7941G
- Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phones 7920
- Cisco Emergency Responder

Wireless

- Cisco 4400 Series Wireless LAN Controller
- Cisco Aironet® 1131 Access Points



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