

Emerging Reseller Provides Large-Company Service

TBL Networks, Inc. offers a more attractive service-level agreement than larger competitors, thanks to an automated trouble-ticket handling application developed with Cisco Unified Application Environment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TBL NETWORKS, INC.

- Cisco Reseller
- Glen Allen, Virginia
- 6 employees

CHALLENGE

- Compete against larger resellers
- Provide excellent customer service
- Reduce costs

SOLUTION

- Made employees always reachable at the same number
- Enabled employees to be productive in any workspace
- Developed application to automate trouble-ticket collection and assignment

RESULTS

- Offers a one-hour service-level agreement that is better than competitors'
- Keeps personnel costs down by making existing engineers more productive
- Doubled revenues in six months without increasing staff
- Saved \$57,000 by operating without office space for nine months
- Develops custom applications four times faster than typical

Challenge

Based on its exceptional customer service, nobody would guess that TBL Networks, Inc. of Glen Allen, Virginia has only six employees. Founded in April 2007, the young company became a Cisco® Certified Premier Partner in just one month and has already applied for Silver Partner status. The winning combination of technical expertise (all three principals have a CCIE® Voice) and a commitment to service and support have enabled the company to successfully compete against much larger resellers to provide unified communications solutions for customers of all sizes.

The company's founders knew they needed innovative ways to provide excellent service without continually hiring new people. "As a new company and small business, we had to keep our costs down," says Alan Sears, president and chief executive officer. "Adding more and more employees is not the answer."

One way to do the work of a larger company would be making it easy to reach employees whether they were in the office, at a customer site, at home, or on the move. Another requirement was offering a one-hour service level agreement (SLA), which is an increasingly popular customer requirement and a must-have to compete against larger resellers. To offer the SLA without hiring more staff, the company wanted a way to automate the process of opening cases, assigning them to an engineer, and communicating case status to customers.

Solution

TBL met its goals with Cisco Unified Communications. The Cisco Unified Communications applications reside on servers in TBL Networks' co-location facility. Employees can receive services over the network from any workspace: office, home, or a customer's location, using an IP phone or mobile device.

Single-Number Reach

When customers or coworkers need to reach a TBL Networks employee, they dial a single number that rings the employee's office phone, cell phone, and home office phone. The same number also accepts a fax. "Work is no longer a place; work is where you are," says Sears. "We have just one phone number on our business cards, along with the line, 'How many numbers do you have?'" Customers appreciate the simplicity, and employees appreciate the time saved trying to reach coworkers.

Presence

When a customer calls with a question, the employee who answers can find an available engineer by checking employees' presence information, which tells whether they are available and how they prefer to be reached. If the presence information shows that an engineer is on the phone, for example, a coworker can get a response sooner by just sending an instant message using Cisco Unified Personal Communicator.

One-Hour SLAs

TBL Networks can confidently offer one-hour SLAs that are actually better than its larger competitors', thanks to an application developed using the Cisco Unified Application Environment. Customers submit service requests by phone, email, or the company's web portal. When a customer calls, for example, the application recognizes the phone number, prompts the caller to describe the problem, and records the description. Behind the scenes, the application opens a case in salesforce.com, attaches the message as a sound file, and provides the case number to the customer. Automating the process makes it unnecessary to assign an employee to answer support calls and emails and enter information into salesforce.com.

"After we put our children to bed we can join a board meeting from home using Cisco Unified MeetingPlace Express. It's easier, saves gas, and lets us spend more time with our families."

—Alan Sears, President and Chief Executive Officer, TBL Networks, Inc.

Next, rather than having a person try to find an available engineer, the application automatically dials the company's on-call engineers and plays the case message. If the engineer can take the case, he enters his employee ID. When this occurs, the application immediately updates the customer's salesforce.com record with the engineer's name. This information instantly appears on the TBL Networks customer web portal so the customer can see right away that the case has been assigned.

David Cantwell, chief information officer, developed the application for automating trouble-ticket assignment without any formal training on Cisco Unified Application Environment. It took him just one and one-half weeks, compared to six or more weeks for typical Windows application development.

TBL Networks also develops custom unified communications applications for its customers — another way that it differentiates itself from other resellers. Recent examples include a scheduling interface for Cisco Unified Communications Manager's ad-hoc conferencing resources and a global corporate directory that can search across multiple Cisco Unified Communications Manager clusters. "Cisco Unified Application Environment makes it much faster to develop applications that

improve business processes, partly because we don't need to test the solution for compatibility with our other Cisco applications," says Cantwell.

Results

Cisco Unified Communications has helped TBL Networks increase productivity and differentiate its SLAs. By making it easier to reach employees and work from anywhere, TBL Networks was able to double its business revenue in six months without adding staff. "Cisco Unified Communications has enabled a six-person company to act like a 15- to 20-person company," says Sears.

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—David Cantwell, Chief Information Officer, TBL Networks, Inc.

Competitive Advantage

"Our SLAs are better than those of many resellers with 50 to 100 employees because the clock starts ticking when the request is made — not after an engineer has been assigned," says Patrick Tredway, chief financial officer. TBL recently won a 12-month managed service support contract because the customer had confidence that the system would result in faster problem resolution.

The company's engineers can diagnose and fix many customer problems from any workspace using Cisco Unified MeetingPlace Express for voice, video, and web collaboration. Tredway once received an urgent call while he was working at a customer location. "Rather than having to leave one customer to drive to another, I was able to solve the problem from where I was," he says. "Using Cisco Unified MeetingPlace Express to control the customer's PC, I diagnosed and fixed the problem in just 15 minutes. Both customers were happier, and I eliminated a couple of hours of driving from my response time."

Lower Office Space Costs

During the first nine months of business, TBL Networks saved approximately \$57,000 by avoiding office space rent and an upfront capital outlay for furniture. Instead, all employees worked from home using the Cisco Enterprise Class Teleworker solution and a Cisco Unified IP Phone. They had voicemail, presence, and single-number reach. "To make this arrangement work, we also needed a substitute for the typical office experience of looking at a document over someone's shoulder," says Sears. The team found its answer in Cisco Unified MeetingPlace Express. When employees are using Cisco Unified Personal Communicator, they can just click a button to share the document on their desktop over the web.

When the company moved into its new offices, it did not want to relegate employees to sitting in the lobby to greet guests. Therefore, when visitors open the door to TBL Networks, they see a digital signage message in the lobby that invites them to pick up the Cisco Unified IP Phone receiver for reception. This rings every phone in the office, and when an employee answers, the guest sees that person on the 22-inch flat panel display mounted above the IP phone. "Our video receptionist saves us around \$3500 a month in rent for office space with a larger lobby and the cost of a dedicated receptionist," says Sears. "It also has a great 'wow' factor and right away conveys our culture of innovation."

Improved Work-Life Balance

Although the company now has office space, the three principals still attend board meetings from home. "After we put our children to bed, we can join a board meeting using Cisco Unified MeetingPlace Express," says Sears. "It's easier, saves gas, and lets us spend more time with our families. Video helps us know if we're getting our point across and how the other two are reacting."

Sears concludes, "I can sum up the advantages of Cisco Unified Communications in one word: flexibility. Other than adding more hours in the day, Cisco Unified Communications is the best way to help our employees be as productive as possible."

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Communications, visit: www.cisco.com/go/uc

To find out more about Cisco Unified Application Environment, visit: www.cisco.com/go/cuae

To find out more about Cisco solutions for small business, visit www.cisco.com/go/smb

PRODUCT LIST

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Integrated Services Router 2811 with Survivable Remote Site Telephony
- Cisco Wide-Area Application Services

Voice and Unified Communications

- Cisco Unified Communication Manager Business Edition
- Cisco Unity Connection
- T.37 On-Ramp Fax Gateway
- Cisco Unified Mobility
- Cisco Unified Application Environment
- Cisco Unified Video Advantage
- Cisco Unified Personal Communicator
- Cisco Unified MeetingPlace Express
- Cisco Unified Contact Center Express
- Cisco 871W Enterprise Class Teleworker
- Cisco Unified IP Phones 7985, 7975, 7965, 7945, 7921, 7937
- Cisco IP Communicator

Wireless

- Cisco Unified Wireless Network

Security and VPN

- Cisco Adaptive Security Appliance 5510
- Cisco Secure Access Control Server
- Cisco Security Agent
- Cisco NAC Appliance



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