

Local Government Enhances Communications System to Prepare for Growth

Cairns Regional Council engaged Dimension Data to integrate Unified Communications and Microsoft business applications to improve communications.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CAIRNS REGIONAL COUNCIL

- Local Government
- Australia
- 1000+ employees

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Enhance collaboration among employees in distributed sites
- Improve citizen service
- Prepare for merger with another nearby local government

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Upgraded network to provide needed scalability, reliability, and security
- Replaced PBX systems with centralized Cisco Unified Communications Manager
- Engaged Dimension Data to integrate Cisco and Microsoft solutions

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Increased ease of reaching people every time, everywhere
- Simplified system administration
- Will save AU\$120,000 annually (anticipated)

Business Challenge

Located in Tropical North Queensland, Australia, the Cairns Regional Council serves a growing population currently numbering 130,000. To achieve its goal of becoming the best regional city in Australia and the Asia-Pacific, the 1000-member Council's long-range plan includes increased service effectiveness, economic development, social inclusion, and environmentally and socially sustainable operations.

To support its growing population, the Council needs to help ensure that it can meet increased demand for government services, both from citizens and Council employees. Of particular concern was the voice system. "We had 35 traditional PBX [private branch exchange] and key systems, which were becoming expensive to maintain, had reached capacity, and would require upgrades if we wanted to add more features," says Rob Dodin, team leader of information services infrastructure, Cairns Regional

Council. The need for a new communications system had grown even more urgent because the Council planned to merge with Douglas Shire Council to serve 142,700 citizens living within a 4135 square-kilometer region. "We realized that we would need to build new infrastructure to meet current and future demands, and so we wanted to make sure it would be highly scalable as well as reliable and secure," says Dodin.

Network Solution

For assistance with designing, deploying, and supporting a new unified communications system, Cairns Regional Council approached Dimension Data, a Cisco® Certified Gold Partner that had helped design and deploy the Council's IP network in 2001. The Council selected Dimension Data over several other vendors primarily because of its expertise with integrating Cisco Unified Communications with Microsoft applications. The integration would simplify system administration and also give employees more powerful collaboration tools, such as managing voicemail from the Microsoft Outlook inbox and a click-to-call capability.

In June 2007, the Council and Dimension Data embarked on a pilot with several hundred users, including the Council's IT team and employees at the main office. First, they upgraded the network foundation to provide the necessary bandwidth for voice over IP and to provide Power over

Ethernet for IP phones. Next, Dimension Data deployed a Cisco Unified Communications Manager system in the main office and integrated it with Microsoft Exchange 2007, Microsoft Integrated Identity Server (IIS), and Dimension Data's easy-to-use management interface, called IP Telephony Active Directory (IPAD).

Integration between the Cisco Unified Communications solution and Microsoft Active Directory and Microsoft IIS saves time for IT employees, because the user information in Microsoft Active Directory is automatically transferred to Cisco Unified Communications applications, avoiding lengthy provisioning time. "It was evident that Dimension Data had prior experience in rolling out such a solution because their deployment methodology was accurate and timely," says Dodin. Changes are faster, as well, because administrators can enter moves, adds, and changes in just one place, Dimension Data's IP Telephony Active Directory (IPAD) software. IPAD automatically updates both the Cisco and Microsoft software, which saves time and helps ensure that information is consistent across all systems.

Business Results

Enhanced Collaboration

Prior to the deployment, Council employees had to look up each other's extensions in paper directories. Now employees can reach each other more quickly by selecting a name from the Active Directory list that appears on the built-in screen of their Cisco Unified IP phone. They can manage their voicemail messages as well as their e-mail messages in one place, the Microsoft Exchange e-mail inbox, and click to hear them in any order. "We're now enjoying far better quality communications, which means we can all spend less time chasing people and more time on productive work," says Dodin.

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— Rob Dodin , Team Leader Infrastructure , Cairns Regional Council

Support for Mobile Employees

Approximately half of the Council's employees work in remote sites or are mobile. Cisco Unified Communications lets them receive calls to their office number from any workspace: main office, remote office, home, or hotel. They can listen to their office voicemail messages from their Microsoft Exchange 2007 inbox on their computer or from an IP phone, traditional phone, or mobile phone. Council IT staff use Cisco IP Communicator software on their laptops, which lets them receive calls from any location in the building.

Improved Service Effectiveness

If citizens reach the wrong party, employees can transfer them to any Council location with four-digit dialing. This helps the Council resolve citizen calls the first time, helping to improve citizen satisfaction with government.

Improved Manageability and Scalability

Enhanced collaboration has not increased the IT workload, primarily because Dimension Data integrated the Cisco Unified Communications solution with the Microsoft business applications. Changes to the Microsoft Active Directory database are now automatically reflected in the Cisco

Unified Communications solution. “We had disparate [user] databases in the past, but now we can manage everything centrally through Active Directory,” says Dodin.

PRODUCT LIST

Routing and Switching

- Cisco 3845 Router
- Cisco 2821 Router for disaster recovery
- Cisco MCS 7835 Media Convergence Servers

Voice and Unified Communications

- Cisco Unified IP Phones 7941G
- Cisco Unified Communications Manager
- Cisco Unity Unified Messaging
- Cisco Unified Contact Center Express (planned)

Cost Savings

Toll costs for calls between Council sites have been eliminated, because calls now travel over the Council's IP network instead of the public switched telephone network (PSTN). The Council IT staff conducted a cost analysis of the savings from PBX maintenance and eliminating toll costs. “Without even taking into consideration the intangible costs of resources and manpower, we were looking at savings of AU\$120,000 a year from unified communications,” says Dodin.

Next Steps

The Council and Dimension Data are in the process of adding the remaining 700 employees to the Cisco Unified Communications system. New Cisco Unified Communications applications are planned to further enhance employee productivity and citizen service, including:

- Presence information, so that employees can identify resources who are currently available and their preferred contact method.
- Click to dial.
- Instant messaging.
- Videoconferencing, to further enhance internal collaboration among the Council's far-flung sites.
- Cisco Unified Contact Center Express for departments that receive high call volume, including the Central Customer Service Center, the IT service desk, and the Civic Theatre's box office, all of which are in different locations. Dimension Data will integrate Cisco Unified Contact Center Express with the Council's customer relationship management software so that when contact center agents receive citizen calls, they see a “screen pop” showing information about the caller and past calling history, improving the customer experience.
- Indoor wireless and dual-mode phones, which connect over the WiFi network when in range and over the cellular network otherwise. This will enable citizens and colleagues to dial a single number to reach mobile employees wherever they happen to be, and also reduce cellular minutes used.

“We've upgraded our infrastructure to the latest Cisco IP network, so the back-end work has been done,” says Dodin. “Now, when we want to add new unified communications applications or capabilities, we've got a platform that will accommodate them.”

For More Information

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



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