Idaho's New Collaboration Tools Help Streamline Communications

Idaho Transportation Department deploys unified communications environment to streamline collaboration.

Executive Summary

Idaho Transportation Department
- **Industry:** State and Local Government
- **Location:** Boise, Idaho
- **Number of Employees:** 1800

CHALLENGE
- Desire to unify collaboration platforms to communicate effectively across the entire department
- Need to ensure all tools purchased are being used to their maximum potential
- Desire to save money in the long term by implementing a unified system instead of various case-by-case solutions

SOLUTION
- Audit current communications environment to identify strengths, weaknesses
- Develop a standardized communications infrastructure with a clearly defined architecture
- Deploy unified collaboration tools across the department

RESULTS
- Improved ease of use of all collaboration tools, particularly for employees on the road
- Exceeded adoption rate target due to extensive testing and training
- Reduced overall IT spending by eliminating miscellaneous one-time communications purchases

Challenge

The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) is responsible for everything related to transportation in the state. Its 1800 full-time employees and numerous other contractors help oversee highway construction, small airports, and the Department of Motor Vehicles, among other things. With only 1.5 million people, Idaho is not an extremely populous state, but stretches for more than 83,000 square miles. Only 1800 Department of Transportation employees and various contractors are responsible for covering this entire area. This means the department's employees have to wear many hats and makes it vital for them to be able to communicate quickly and effectively across the entire organization.

The issue was that the ITD did not have a unified communications environment in place, so employees were purchasing and deploying various communications tools as they needed them. According to Alberto Gonzalez, one of ITD's enterprise architects, this left the department with "a hodgepodge of services that people were patching together to create collaboration." This piecemeal strategy also meant that various services were purchased and either not used to their maximum potential or not used at all, which ITD wanted to correct.

Not only was this an ineffective way to communicate, but it also had negative repercussions from a financial standpoint as well. "There was a greater cost from people buying little individual pieces than if there were a clear overarching architecture," said Gonzalez. To control these costs and ensure that all employees were able to communicate with each other easily and efficiently, a more cohesive collaboration solution was needed.

Solution

ITD realized they needed to create a standardized communications environment with a clear architecture approach, and the services deployed needed to be easy for all their employees to use. To address the challenge, the department started with an audit of its entire communications environment, assessing what services it had in place, what the businesses were actually using, and what needed to be changed. The department's staff then compared different products on the market and decided to deploy Cisco® collaboration tools to help unite the department's communications.

Cisco and its partner Presidio helped the department test collaboration solutions through a comprehensive 90-day pilot program. During this period, 40 ITD employees tried various Cisco communications tools, including the videoconferencing Cisco WebEx® solution. This group of employees filled out surveys and provided additional feedback on a regular basis, allowing ITD and Cisco to fully understand how end users were maximizing their use of the technology. The consistent feedback also enabled the partnership to tweak products and configurations to best meet the department's needs.

The Cisco pilot program and high level of support was key for ITD, allowing it to roll out its new communications environment much faster than expected. "Without the help from Cisco and Presidio, we probably wouldn't have gotten this far," Gonzalez said.

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> "We couldn't communicate effectively, because employees were using so many different platforms. So, we needed to create a true unified communications environment with a clear architecture behind how we deployed the collaboration tools."

Alberto Gonzalez, Enterprise Architect, Idaho Transportation Department

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Product List

COLLABORATION

- Cisco Unified Communications solutions
- Cisco WebEx solution
- Cisco Jabber solution
- Cisco IP phones
- Cisco Unified Communications Manager (CallManager)

Based on the positive feedback from the pilot program, ITD deployed a Cisco Unified Communications solution with an overall architecture that combines voice, video, and data communications around a shared IP-based infrastructure. The solution simplifies making calls, sending messages, or joining audio or videoconferences. The solution included Cisco IP phones and call management system, which is a unified call control platform. ITD also deployed the Cisco WebEx solution and Cisco Jabber® instant messaging program. These Unified Communications tools provide ITD employees with an easy-to-use suite of collaboration tools. "It is a complete solution, from desk to a videoconference room to a mobile device on the road," said Gonzalez. It's just what the department was looking for.

Results

"With the new ease of interaction between all the department's collaboration tools, employees can stay connected at all times. The Transportation Department covers a huge amount of land with a small staff, and its new services allow people to communicate even while traveling. "Collaboration has already increased with the utilization of the tools," according to Gonzalez. "For example, people love the desktop-sharing function in WebEx."

One of the biggest benefits to employees is the ease of use of all services. The fact that all of the services deployed work together easily makes lives easier, as opposed to the previous difficulty of trying to connect through various different collaboration tools. In fact, Cisco collaboration tools are so user-friendly that the department has already surpassed its initial goal of 50 licenses and is currently at 90. Gonzalez believes they'll reach 150 in the next year or so.

With the new online tools and training videos, people can install tools and troubleshoot problems on their own, which further reduces barriers to use the tools, such as IT involvement, and puts the technology into the employees' own hands. This saves the IT team and allows them to focus on other needs within the department.

Another benefit the department has reaped has been cost savings. Instead of purchasing individual collaboration tools on a case-by-case basis or purchasing tools that went unused or underutilized, the new unified environment will save the department from unnecessary IT spending in the long term.

The pilot program also gave the department a model of how to roll out new technology in the future. ITD staff now has the know-how, the inventory preconfiguration, and the reference material to successfully build onto their current communications environment if the need arises.

For More Information

For more information on Cisco Collaboration go to:
http://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/solutions/collaboration/index.html.