



3Com® Enterprise IP Voice and Data Services Help Prudential Northwest Properties Customers Feel At Home

CASE STUDY

Organization: Prudential Northwest Properties

Location: Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.

Employees/Staff: 750

Market Segment: Insurance

Applications: Unified messaging; “find me, follow me;” automated attendants; customer relationship management (CRM); Estos ProCall software, integrating Caller ID data with customer information; advanced call center services.



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The Challenge

In today’s frenzied real estate market, eager homebuyers and motivated sellers see no reason to wait for their calls to be returned or their e-mail answered. If they don’t get an immediate response to their questions, they simply move on. In fact, a broker who takes just 20 minutes to follow up on a call is apt to lose that customer to the competition.

At the same time, busy agents can’t afford to sit around waiting for the phone to ring. As they race from appointments to open houses and closings, most spend more time in their cars than at their desks. Yet they also need to remain in constant contact with their office to ensure potential customers are always just a phone call away from a hot property.

As the largest independently owned real estate agency in the Pacific Northwest, with more than \$1.6 billion in sales, Prudential Northwest of Portland, OR fully understands the balancing act agents must perform to deliver the prompt phone and in-person responsiveness customers demand. To maintain its leadership, the firm realized last year it needed to do even more to ensure its 750 brokers never missed an opportunity to make a sale.

Opening the Door to Fast Action

Previously, each of Prudential Northwest’s 19 branches throughout Oregon and southwest Washington had its own non-integrated PBX phone system. These legacy systems could not transfer calls between branches; they also lacked even the most basic call handling features, like voice mail and call forwarding, forcing the company to purchase standalone services at additional expense. To remove these barriers to prompt communication and streamline customer service, Prudential Northwest wanted to unite its offices into a single voice infrastructure.

In addition to providing its employees with corporate-class call management features, the company wanted to launch an advanced unified messaging system. By using this system to integrate landline and cellular phone calls with fax, e-mail, voice mail, pagers, and wireless PDAs and laptops into a seamless whole, the realtor could guarantee a fast response to every prospect and customer.

Prudential Northwest soon realized that a voice-over-IP solution operating over its existing Gigabit Ethernet wide area network (WAN) could deliver the call management capabilities it needed, and far more. By routing calls over the WAN, the

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real estate agency could save thousands of dollars in long distance calls between offices. IP telephony would allow the company to realize its plans to deploy unified messaging as well as advanced, find-me-follow-me capabilities. Furthermore, unlike traditional phone systems, an IP-based telephone solution could also interface with Prudential Northwest’s customer relationship management (CRM) database, giving employees near-instant access to customer data at the moment they need it.

“Voice-over-IP technology was the key to dramatically improving our productivity and profitability,” said Sean McRae, vice president and chief information officer of Prudential Northwest Properties. “By integrating every possible method of contact with all available customer data, we can guarantee our agency connects with customers first, fastest, and most accurately.”

Prudential Northwest Properties wanted an IP solution that would integrate well with its existing data infrastructure, was simple to install and manage, and most importantly, was easily expanded to keep pace with rapid growth.

Why 3Com

The solution consists of the following products:

- **3Com® VCX™ V7000 IP Telephony Solution**
Read more here:
http://3com.com/products/en_US/prodlist.jsp?tab=cat&pathype=purchase&cat=23&selcat=Telephone+Systems+%26%2338%3B+Applications&family=135
- **3Com Switch 7700**
Read more here:
http://www.3com.com/products/en_US/detail.jsp?tab=features&pathype=purchase&sku=WEBBNC7700SYS
- **3Com Router 5000 Family**
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- **3Com SuperStack® 3 Networked Telephony Solution**
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http://3com.com/products/en_US/prodlist.jsp?tab=cat&pathype=purchase&cat=23&selcat=Telephone+Systems+%26%2338%3B+Applications

- **3Com SuperStack 3 Switch 4400 Family**
Read more here:
http://www.3com.com/products/en_US/prodlist.jsp?tab=cat&pathype=purchase&cat=4&selcat=LAN+Switches+%28Workgroup%2FDesktop%29
- **3Com SuperStack 3 Firewall**
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After reviewing IP telephony products from Cisco, Avaya, Nortel, and 3Com, Prudential Northwest found that only 3Com offered all the functionality it sought in a solution that was cost-effective, easily scalable, and based on non-proprietary technology. The real estate agency chose a voice-over-IP system based on 3Com’s VCX V7000 IP Telephony and SuperStack 3 NBX® Networked Telephony solutions. Both of these systems support the Session Initiation Protocol (SIP), a carrier-class, open systems messaging standard that will streamline the company’s migration from PBX phones and allow it to introduce advanced, media-independent, multi-user services.

Today, Prudential Northwest’s telephone system consists of a single VCX system in its new Clackamas, OR, office and four NBX systems in its four largest offices. Powered by 16 3Com SuperStack 3 Switch 4400 switches, which provide high-speed connections to the corporate WAN and prioritize voice traffic, these solutions deliver unified messaging and advanced telephony features to the agency’s 750 employees.

At the network core, a 128-port 3Com SuperStack Switch 7700R with built-in security, Quality of Service (QoS), and bandwidth management prioritizes voice traffic at Gigabit Ethernet speed while linking critical network systems, such as servers and WAN routers. In Clackamas, a 3Com Router 5009 router with advanced QoS, congestion, and traffic management capabilities distributes voice and data traffic to Prudential Northwest’s WAN. The company plans to replace aging routers in other offices with additional 3Com routers as needed. The solution also relies on a 3Com SuperStack Firewall, which protects the company’s entire data infrastructure from intruders, while allowing employees to access the phone system securely from their home computers through a VPN tunnel. The company is expected to achieve a full ROI in 36 months from all of its 3Com systems.

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“We’re measuring ROI not just in telecom costs saved, but in customer satisfaction as a result of our improved ability to work faster and handle calls more efficiently,” said McRae. “Our sales grew roughly 15 percent in 2003, and while it’s hard to say exactly how much of that is attributable to the new phone system, our high-sales employees all insist their productivity has skyrocketed since it was installed.”

The Set-Up - Linking Nineteen Locations, Locations, Locations

Prudential Northwest worked with a 3Com network consultant and its longtime reseller, Verizon, to deploy its new voice solution. First, the implementation team preconfigured and installed the core and edge devices. Next, they configured and staged the VCX server and NBX chassis to ensure a rapid deployment. Once the servers and switches were racked, Prudential Northwest simply connected four T-1 lines and began to assign employees their new extensions and direct dial numbers. As a result, the company was able to replace the legacy telephone systems in each branch in just a few hours and begin using the new system the following morning. The voice over IP (VoIP) systems are managed as part of the WAN.

“In the real estate business, we can’t be out of touch for even a moment, so we took a cautious approach to ensure a fast, error-free cutover,” said McRae. “With everything pre-programmed, it was virtually plug-and-play, with minimal onsite configuration.”

Setting up 450 NBX telephones and 300 additional phantom extensions with voice mail was surprisingly simple; the primary challenge was user training. With each of 19 offices using a different legacy system, Prudential Northwest’s IT staff had to train employees at each branch individually - an investment of three to four days per branch.

In addition, the implementation team discovered mid-deployment that one large office was wired with category 4 cable rather than the recommended category 5 cable. With no room in the project budget to rewire the entire site, the firm was forced to use the existing infrastructure. While it’s achieving satisfactory voice quality nonetheless, Prudential Northwest now knows it needs to ensure every branch-office LAN has enough bandwidth to support voice traffic without packet loss.

The Benefits

In the Pacific Northwest, 2004 began with a record-breaking winter storm that encased the region in a treacherous layer of ice. Most local businesses skidded to a halt for the better part of a week, but Prudential Northwest never lost touch with its customers. The secret to its success wasn’t tire chains, snowshoes, or a team of huskies, but IP telephony features that helped its agents stay on the job even as they were stuck at home.

Today, Prudential Northwest’s employees enjoy maximum mobility while remaining in contact with buyers, sellers, mortgage brokers, and other agents. Unified messaging forwards calls to their mobile phones or homes, delivers faxes electronically to their PDAs and computers, alerts them to incoming messages via pager, and even turns email into voice mail with a text-to-speech function. Moreover, with built-in “find me, follow me” notification, incoming calls also generate alerts to employees’ voice mailboxes and pagers, ensuring they never miss a message. Automated attendants direct calls on evenings and weekends and route customers to specific offices and departments, while features such as call forwarding and hunt groups send calls to their proper destinations during business hours.

In the agency’s home services department, which helps new homeowners find the goods and services they need to settle in, a CRM package called Clientele sends Caller ID information to employees’ computers. The employees can then quickly look up the customer’s information in the company’s Microsoft Outlook sales database and determine the likely reason for the call - thus ensuring a fast, accurate response. Roughly a dozen real estate agents are testing Estos ProCall, a software solution that directly integrates Caller ID data with the customer database, to further speed the process.

In addition to boosting performance, the networked telephony system is saving Prudential Northwest thousands of dollars in telephone fees and maintenance costs. Eliminating a legacy standalone voice mail system instantly saved the company \$6,000 a month, while replacing 100 phone lines with four T-1 lines and routing interoffice calls over the WAN cut an additional \$1,000 from the monthly budget. Furthermore, because the IT staff can manage the phone system as part of the larger network infrastructure, the company is saving significant amounts on outsourced maintenance.

Prudential Northwest expects to add further agents and locations to keep pace with fast-rising sales. As it grows, the company plans to expand its voice and data network to maintain customer satisfaction.

The VCX solution, which can scale to accommodate tens of thousands of users, will eventually support many of the branches now connected to smaller NBX systems as well as those the company opens in the future. This will enable Prudential Northwest to create a single call center to manage all call traffic for its smaller offices over the WAN—further improving efficiency while guaranteeing every location has the advanced call-handling functions it needs.

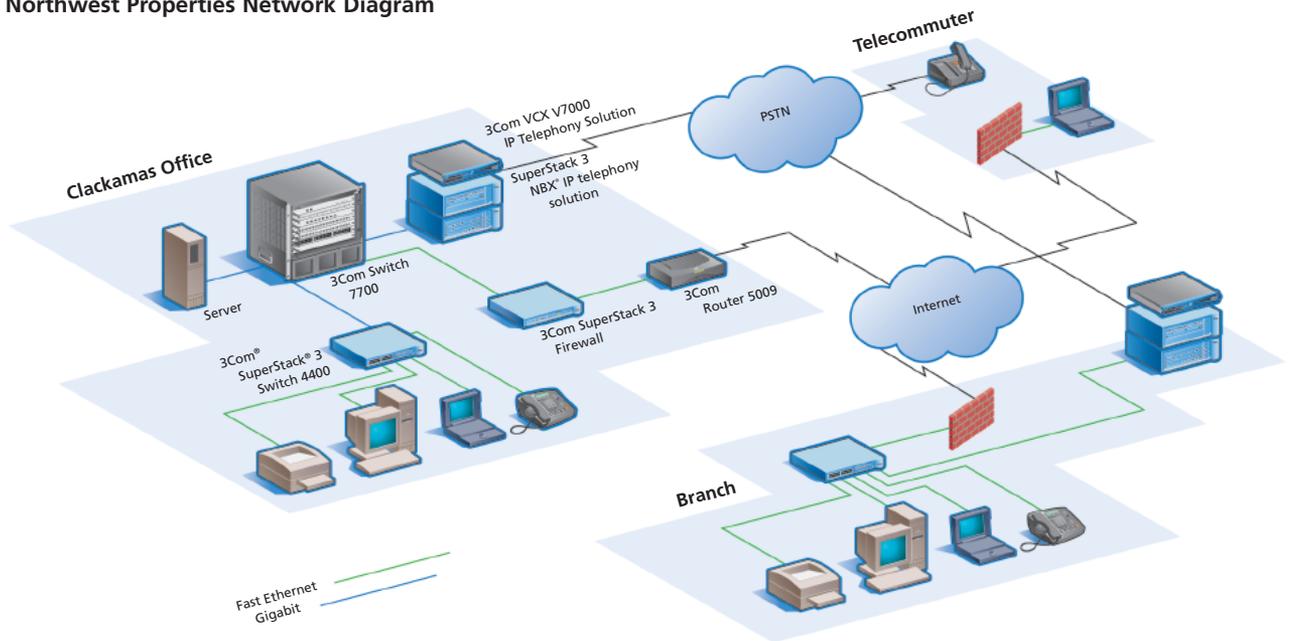
Prudential Northwest also intends to use its new Switch 7700R core switch to set up two secure virtual LANs: one exclusively for voice traffic and one for servers supporting back-end applications ranging from mortgage underwriting to internal e-mail. This will further protect the quality of voice transmissions while also blocking unauthorized access to customers' sensitive financial records.

"Making our agents so highly available in so many ways increases their aura of professionalism and allows them to deliver a superior level of customer service," McRae concluded. "With IP telephony, and universal messaging in particular, we have new tools with which to plan creative, flexible ways to serve our customers."

For more information about 3Com products:

1-800-NET-3Com
 (1-800-638-3266)
www.3com.com

Prudential Northwest Properties Network Diagram



3Com Corporation, Corporate Headquarters, 350 Campus Drive, Marlborough, MA 01752-3064

To learn more about 3Com solutions, visit www.3com.com. 3Com is publicly traded on NASDAQ under the symbol COMS.

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