FORWARD MANAGEMENT

CASE STUDY   **SWITCHVOX**

OVERVIEW

The financial services industry is a fast-moving, constantly changing environment where a single missed telephone call could easily cost a company $50,000 or more. Reliable telecommunication is the key to Forward Management's ability to provide a wide range of investment advice and asset management services to their investor network and institutional clientele. Located in San Francisco's downtown financial district, Forward Management had been operating an Avaya IP400 Digital Office PBX for the past 6 years, providing them with solid call quality, but a limited feature set. With 110 employees and a growing number of external sales reps out in the field, they sought an enterprise-level VoIP business solution for 95 phones and 12 analog devices that would lessen the heavy licensing costs associated with the old system. It must be user-friendly; not sacrifice call quality, but provide a wide range of features; and be flexible enough to accommodate company growth, including the eventual elimination of their Primary Rate Interface (PRI) for SIP (Session Initiation Protocol) trunks.

San Francisco Financial Services Company Impressed By Switchvox Flexibility and Cost Savings

"At first, we had plenty of time to investigate options. Our strategy involved taking our case to the people who use the system every day," says Mark Fowler, Forward Management's IT Manager. "We talked to everyone in the department about what they needed because user-satisfaction is very important to us. We then used that information to narrow our search." Responding to an Internet inquiry, Digium Preferred Partner, TeleDynamic Communications, contacted Forward Management to offer some suggestions. The largest Digium Switchvox reseller in Northern California, they specialize in standards-based SIP PBX solutions.

Forward Management wanted to maintain some of their current capabilities like four-digit dialing between the San Francisco office and their external employees. According to TeleDynamic owner, Randy Kremlacek, they had some other requirements as well. "They needed a more affordable way to hold voice conferences for more than ten users without tying up their phone lines; plus, they needed a switchboard display unit that could display more than fifty lines for the receptionist."

In addition to these criteria, Forward Management was looking for a lease-to-own solution with sales force integration, causing them to lean towards a more traditional, and so-called "trusted" brand name in telecom like Cisco, NEC, or Avaya. That changed however, when TeleDynamic sent them viable information on integrating sales force with the Digium Switchvox, and wowed them with Switchvox's price points for outright ownership. Forward Management looked at systems from NEC, Cisco, and even an updated Avaya system. "There were pros and cons to both," Fowler says, "but when we looked at the unified messaging package, costs, and flexibility, we felt Switchvox stood apart from the others. Unfortunately however, changes to our existing Avaya lease put us in an unexpected time crunch."

The Crunch Time Challenge

Forward Management had months to research their telecom options, but a change to their Avaya leasing agreement created a significant problem."Suddenly our three-month window narrowed to thirty days and we were asking TeleDynamic to help us get an eight-week installation job up and running in just two weeks," Fowler says.

TeleDynamic brought in a Switchvox SMB demo system with phones so management could test the system throughout the 25,000 square-foot facility, which consists of an open office plan with a datacenter, reception area, and private offices. They purchased the Digium Switchvox SMB AA355 as their primary system, which will support up to 400 users and primes Forward Management for ample growth and expansion on a large scale. They also purchased a Switchvox AA65 with a PRI card as a warm spare for emergency backup and recovery purposes. All fully compatible with Switchvox, they purchased a mixture of Yealink TP28P executive phones for the reception area; TP26P standard IP phones; T20 entry-level IP phones, and an Exp38 expansion module.

With their Avaya system, Forward Management was using a separate cabling infrastructure dedicated to voice, thereby not utilizing IP for telecommunications; but they were using it for data. The Avaya had been running on two proprietary RJ45 (Registered Jack) conductor lines, which are standardized network interfaces that connected their telecommunications to their local and long distance service provider. Since the IP infrastructure existed for data, TeleDynamic was able to reuse their existing cabling, which saved considerable time and money installing the Switchvox solution. "We did purchase 24-port POE (Power over Ethernet) switches in order to get power to the phones," Fowler says.

Hesitating to replace their PRI, which is still standard in the ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) for carrying collaborative multi-media voice and data transmissions at the enterprise-level, Forward Management decided to retain their existing PRI circuit, due to its proven performance. For voice communications, SIP technology is an evolving new signaling protocol that will eventually replace the PRI technology. Only widely available in the past couple of years, Fowler felt it was too big a step to take right now. "I have no doubt we will eventually implement SIP, but for now, we feel secure with our PRI."

Switchvox Solutions

Fowler sees three significant benefits to having chosen Digium Switchvox over competing solutions. The first is of course, cost points. "Had we bought any of the proprietary systems like Avaya or NEC, we would be easily looking at $60,000 in additional costs," Fowler explains. "We have also unlocked savings in terms of Switchvox user applications without the expense of costly licenses; and thirdly, although we are still not using one hundred percent of Switchvox's features, so far the feedback from our users is positive for unified communications and things like email notification and call presence. Our associates love it that no matter where they are, they know when they have a call, and who that caller is."

With July 1, 2011 as their target date, the installation was complete by June 22. According to Michael Hong, Forward Management's Network Administrator, programming continues beyond that date. One of the inconveniences brought about because of the time crunch involved the timing of Switchvox's most recent upgrade from 4.6 to 5.0. "We barely missed the upgrade, just finishing the original installation days before it came out," Hong says. "Had we not been facing the time constraints of the Avaya contract, we could have held off. Instead, we are getting acclimated to the 4.6 version, and feel piling on an upgrade would just complicate matters until we are completely comfortable with the current system."

For tracking purposes, Switchvox generates global call logs that provide Forward Management with the information needed to save the company and their client's money. "A missed call can easily cost us $50,000 or more," Fowler says. "We needed to be able to rely on ourselves to manage the telecom on a daily basis, and not have to call someone in if we have problems. We wanted a simplified system we could trust and manage, and I think we have that with Digium Switchvox."

Currently, with the new system in place, Switchvox has fulfilled their main objectives, providing an intuitive and flexible system that is expandable and easy to use, while saving Forward Management money in licensing, hosting fees, and proprietary equipment. They are in the process of implementing some additional administrative training, as Hong is currently programming on the fly. "We are happy with the Switchvox product and its unified messaging capabilities," Fowler says. "We are experimenting right now with a softphone, and as we get more comfortable with SIP technology, we will be both upgrading to the 5.0 version of the Switchvox software and switching our PRI out for SIP trunks, which we understand will bring about additional savings. Overall, we are quite impressed."

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