



Industry: Professional Services
Installation: 2 locations; 4 ShoreGear voice switches and 150+ ShorePhone IP phones
Competition: Cisco
Date of Install: May 2006



Challenge:

When AlphaStaff was faced with significant growth and had outgrown its telephone system, the organization decided it was time to look into VoIP solutions with disaster recovery capabilities (to keep business going through hurricane seasons) plus the capacity to integrate home and remote offices into a centralized system.

Solution:

ShoreTel provided the staffing firm with a comprehensive solution, including ShoreGear switches, ShorePhone IP telephones, and ShoreWare Director for end-to-end management.

Benefits:

- AlphaStaff saves thousands in toll charges every month because remote workers' calls are distributed through AlphaStaff's office locations, which provide much better long distance rates.
- The disaster recovery capabilities of ShoreTel ensure AlphaStaff remains up and running to serve its 38,000 customers even during a natural disaster or regional power outage.
- ShoreTel allows employees to work from anywhere and still look like they are working from an AlphaStaff location—caller ID indicates AlphaStaff and calls are distributed to wherever someone is working on any given day.

S U C C E S S S T O R I E S

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

ALPHASTAFF REAPS MONETARY REWARDS OF VOIP AND GAINS A DISASTER RECOVERY PLAN FOR BUSINESS CONTINUITY

ShoreTel VoIP System Ensures Business as Usual Even During a Hurricane or Other Natural Disaster

AlphaStaff Group, Inc. is a human resource outsourcing company, offering flexible employer solutions that control costs, address key compliance issues, and provide legal liability protection. Through FlexSource™, a complete portfolio of products and services, or via co-employment, AlphaStaff focuses on HR and technology integration, with payroll, benefits, tax, accounting, and risk management for mid-market companies. AlphaStaff has two locations serving its 38,000+ human resource customers, including its headquarters in Ft. Lauderdale and an office in Atlanta.

HELP WANTED

In 2005, AlphaStaff had seen growth of 33% over four years and outgrew its office in Boca Raton, Florida. With an outdated Panasonic PBX-based system, the company lacked sufficient disaster recovery and remote capabilities, and it could not link its system to its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solution.

“When we were looking for a new location, we looked carefully at how we did business,” said Jack Rahner, Director of IT Operations for AlphaStaff. “We determined that a large percentage of our workers worked remotely or from home and we had to upgrade a new phone system that would integrate those workers into our telephone system. The move was the perfect time to look for a phone system that would support a new and quickly growing call center.”

AlphaStaff's top priority was a new phone system that would provide a disaster recovery plan to ensure business continuity in case of disaster, such as a hurricane. Since AlphaStaff provides payroll services for many of its customers, more than 38,000 of them, they could not afford to have a system down when people are waiting for paychecks, which is what would happen with the old system because there were limited disaster recovery and remote capabilities in place.

THE INTERVIEWS

Rahner had run a large call center for companies in his past so he was fully aware of what a Voice over IP (VoIP) system could do for AlphaStaff. He began looking closely at market leaders Avaya, Cisco, Nortel and ShoreTel. He issued a Request for Proposal (RFP), spoke with customer references and saw product demonstrations. He also spoke with colleagues of his that were using some of the solutions. He ended up doing a side by side comparison of Cisco and



ShoreTel. He chose to look at Cisco because of the company's reputation and lengthy customer reference list, but ShoreTel caught his interest because of the distributed nature of the system, which perfectly fit his disaster recovery plans. After five months using both systems in lab test environments in multiple cities, talking with Cisco and ShoreTel engineers, and evaluating disaster recovery features, AlphaStaff chose ShoreTel.

“We did major architectural design evaluations of both Cisco and ShoreTel, and we were very impressed with the distributed architecture of ShoreTel—something Cisco did not offer,” said Rahner. “ShoreTel has truly taken a revolutionary approach to designing a phone system, taking the IP concept and designing the system around that. ShoreTel's distributed architecture provides us with disaster recovery capabilities, which was a key requirement for us.”

THE SELECTION

With the help of its reseller partner, ShoreTel provided AlphaStaff with two of its ShoreGear® 120/24 voice switches, and two ShoreGear 60/12 voice switches, as well as over 150 ShorePhone™ IP telephones. “The reseller was an integral part of our selection process, and we're thankful that they brought ShoreTel to our attention,” said Rahner. Rahner notes that the disaster recovery features in the ShoreTel system allows the company to run its Ft. Lauderdale-based business and continue to service 38,000 people without losing a step during a disaster, such as Hurricane Wilma.

“The disaster recovery capabilities are great, and actually we use them routinely,” said Rahner. “For instance, we brought down our Atlanta facility for some maintenance purposes and were able to re-route all of those calls—it was completely transparent to customers calling in.”

EASILY ADAPTED

The ShoreTel implementation was simple and Rahner notes that it is very easy to maintain the system, even remotely. ShoreWare® Director, ShoreTel's browser-based management interface, allows AlphaStaff's IT personnel to access the system from anywhere on the network. Through this browser, every site and feature can be managed, including voice mail, automated attendant and desktop applications. When a new user is added, an administrator simply clicks “add new” and enters the user's name; this automatically updates the centralized database and voice switches, and it also creates a new mailbox for the user. The automated attendant dial-by-name and number feature and online directories are updated also—all in just a few seconds.

“Moves, adds and changes are much easier with ShoreTel—it's like night and day compared to the old system,” said Rahner. “We're able to manage the entire system in-house with two entry-level technicians on board. ShoreTel has a very intuitive interface and managing the entire system is fast and easy.”

ROBUST SKILL SET

ShoreTel phone systems are easy to use, flexible, and reliable. With the ShoreTel system in place, all AlphaStaff employees are on a centralized phone and voice mail system, using 4-digit dialing to reach employees at either location, even when they're working from home. The ShoreTel system

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also gives each AlphaStaff employee a graphical interface on their computer, ShoreTel's Personal Call Manager™, which provides Microsoft Outlook integration with employee computers for directory dialing, contact screen pops, and calendar integration. ShoreWare Personal Call Manager gives users the equivalent of a desktop PBX—a powerful, all-purpose tool for managing voice communications. With it, employees can quickly type in a name, bring up a number, and make their calls from local online directories—all with the click of a mouse, right from the desktop.

With ShoreTel's e-mail integration, employees centrally manage their e-mail and voice mail activity. Voice mail messages are stored in the industry-standard WAV Audio for Windows format, allowing users to play them on multimedia PCs, attach them to e-mail messages or embed them in other documents. The ability of the ShoreTel system to track customer phone calls, export and distribute voice mails files, and keep a running history of calls into each number is helpful in continually monitoring and improving customer service.

“Before ShoreTel, employees handed out business cards with two or three telephone numbers on them,” said Rahner. “Now, with ShoreTel, they only have to give people one number, which either reaches them wherever they are or sends the caller into voice mail, which automatically triggers an e-mail to the intended person. Nobody misses a call and everything is centralized. We've improved productivity and time efficiency, as well as customer service.”

AlphaStaff is also utilizing ShoreTel's Converged Conferencing Solution, a 48-port conference bridge, which allows employees to quickly and easily set up conference calls on the fly, minimizing the time it takes to address customer or office-related issues. “I expect the return on investment for the conference bridge will be about six months, based on what we'll save not using an outside service provider,” said Rahner.

OFFICE ANYWHERE WORKS ANYWHERE

ShoreTel's Office Anywhere™ allows AlphaStaff employees to choose the device they work from - for instance, a cell phone or home phone—and that device assumes the identity and capabilities of his or her regular office extension. For example, the caller-ID information provided when the employee makes a call will reflect their office number instead of the mobile or home-office phone actually being used. Office Anywhere also enables seamless participation in workgroups, hunt groups, and contact centers, and it provides AlphaStaff with a cost-effective method of pulling in remote and home office workers.

“Office Anywhere helps us solidify our brand by allowing caller ID to indicate AlphaStaff is calling, even if the call is being placed from a worker's home office,” said Rahner. “Employees also no longer need to call our Atlanta or Ft. Lauderdale offices to reach colleagues—they call a colleague's 4-digit number or the central number and the system automatically reaches the intended person at whichever phone they are working. This has improved customer satisfaction considerably since callers just automatically reach the right person at one number, regardless of where that person is working for the day.”

Office Anywhere also helps streamline calls and save on long distance

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charges. With two T1s coming into each of the primary locations, remote workers make their long distance calls through the closest location. “Home offices have their regular telephone lines, and before we had much higher long distance charges via home and cell phones,” said Rahner. “With ShoreTel, remote workers still utilize the PSTN network but their calls are routed through our main office lines. Since we get much better long distance rates than those workers do at home, we're saving literally thousands every month.”

BRIGHT FUTURE

AlphaStaff is still growing and plans to add another office and another call center in the near future. ShoreTel can quickly and easily expand to accommodate that growth. AlphaStaff also plans to integrate ShoreTel into its CRM solution, which will give call center employees even more robust information on callers before picking up the phone. CRM integration will provide screen pop-ups with detailed customer information, which will maximize sales and enhance the customer's experience.

“Changing phone systems from standard to VoIP is a cultural change, considering remote users go from using a cell phone to using an office phone, but with ShoreTel it was an easy adjustment,” said Rahner. “Everybody loves the ShoreTel system—including the CEO and Chairman. The fact that we're saving so much money and I'm assured of disaster recovery also helps me sleep much better at night. I look forward to developing a new call center in Atlanta, now that we have ShoreTel as our IP telephony partner.”