



VOIP EASES COLLABORATION FOR HITACHI CONSULTING

ShoreTel Supports Virtual Teams While Slashing Voice Costs

Hitachi Consulting is in the business of “enabling the agile and real-time enterprise,” which means being pretty quick and flexible itself. When the Dallas-based IT software specialist was spun off as an independent entity in November of 2000, it was clear that the existing phone system was too rigid and disjointed to mesh the new company’s far-flung offices into a single, virtual resource pool.

“For the first six months, we stayed in our old offices and continued to share the existing infrastructure, which included a brand-new Avaya phone system,” says Michael Shisko, IT Director for Hitachi Consulting. “However, while all the offices had a common switch platform, the installations were done by local technicians who had their own way of doing things, so the system was not really the same at every site.

“I found myself administering 12 different phone systems.” Also, different features were turned on at the various sites, and sometimes the same code was used for different functions. This made it difficult for the consulting firm’s highly mobile staff to use the phones as they traveled from office to office.

There was a single management console, but it didn’t provide a single-system view. The network administrator had to connect to a particular switch and deal with it individually. Shisko had also seen what was involved in the installation at each site: three days of Avaya technicians on site, then another day for the cutover, followed by a significant amount of training for the in-house staff.

As the consulting firm planned the move to its own offices, a better voice solution seemed in order.

“We wanted a phone system that would provide five-digit dialing across all offices, local phone numbers for each office, toll bypass, and unified management. We knew we weren’t going to have resident IT staff at each office which we were used to so, remote administration was important. We didn’t want anyone to have to go on site to do anything.”

VoIP: Not Just a Better Mousetrap

VoIP platforms were evaluated, and Cisco’s solution was rejected as it was too complex and costly. Other VoIP solutions were dismissed because they didn’t allow local phone numbers for each office, or implemented them by forwarding local DIDs across an 800 trunk and running up big and unpredictable long-distance charges in the process.

The consulting firm decided to stick a toe into the VoIP waters with an installation in the Seattle office. “The system, which was based on the

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A Unified Network Boosts Productivity

ShoreTel’s Call Manager gives employees unified messaging and access to a dial-by-name directory that integrates with Microsoft Outlook. There is no need to remember or look up extension numbers or know which office a particular person was in at the moment. ShoreTel’s “presence” intelligence indicates each person’s current status—such as in the office but on the phone—so the caller can make informed choices.

Similarly, frequently called outsiders could suddenly be dialed by pointing and clicking on entries in public-folder contact lists. There is no need for each person to maintain a separate list, so a lot of repetitive effort is eliminated.

The extremely intuitive Call Manager user interface required virtually no training, and employees were soon availing themselves of features that had previously been inaccessible to all but a handful of telecom gurus. “We found out how much penetration there had been when we had to disable the ShoreTel client temporarily and people had to go back to the old way of using their phones,” Shisko says.

ShoreTel’s Extension Monitor is making life easier for executive assistants. They can use it to monitor incoming calls placed directly to their bosses, and jump in if the Caller-ID information shows that a particularly important caller is about to bounce to voicemail.

Much of Hitachi Consulting’s workforce is highly mobile, and the consultants and salespeople can be just as productive when they find themselves temporarily in a different office. They simply log in to the local network, and any calls made to their home-office numbers automatically follow them. The ShoreTel client gives them access to all the same features in exactly the same way.

A Unified Network Serves Customers Better

ShoreTel’s unified, intelligent network provides a platform for ad hoc voice collaboration by virtual teams, enabling multi-site professional-services firms to leverage their key asset—human expertise—more fully for the benefit of clients. “Collaboration is about knowledge sharing, and trying to do this in real time without voice doesn’t make any sense,” Shisko says.

At Hitachi Consulting, go-to-market teams of salespeople and consultants are constantly looking for new business and must stay in touch with people working with current clients. When a prospective client is targeted, people are pulled in based on their knowledge about a particular industry or application. ShoreTel’s distributed voice system makes it very easy for formal or impromptu groups to mesh together as needed.

Hitachi Consulting now makes heavy use of voice conferencing, logging some 140,000 minutes of conference calls per month. The use of these virtual meetings continues to expand, and the go-to-market teams may even conference in prospective clients to help focus proposals so they are more likely to win the job.



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Hitachi Consulting’s offices don’t get walk-in business from clients, so there is no need for a resident receptionist in each. People calling a local office and “zeroing out” of the auto-attendant to an operator automatically get routed to a virtual receptionist in the Dallas office. The ShoreTel network is connected to the overhead paging systems in each location, so the operator has the additional option of paging people if an important call doesn’t get picked up.

“By making wide-area paging an extension of the phone system, ShoreTel further enhances the ability of the receptionist to reach people no matter where they are within the Hitachi Consulting offices,” says Shisko.

A Unified Network Streamlines Operations, Pays for Itself

ShoreTel’s uniquely distributed architecture and intuitive management interface makes administration of multi-site networks very simple. Moves, adds, and changes that used to require expensive, time-consuming truck rolls from the local teleconnect now can be done in minutes from anywhere via the browser-based console.

The distributed, peer-to-peer architecture also makes the ShoreTel network highly available. Each ShoreGear switch has complete call control capabilities and can function as a standalone IP PBX if its site is suddenly cut off from the WAN. Conversely, if a particular switch goes or is taken offline, its peers at other locations on the ShoreTel network can cover for it.

“The ShoreTel system has been very, very reliable,” reports Shisko.

The ShoreTel system is also very easy to implement, so it is a simple matter to bring up new offices as they are added. This happens frequently at Hitachi Consulting, which has continued to grow throughout the economic downturn and now has 16 offices on the ShoreTel network.

Least-cost routing can be set up with a few mouse clicks, so long-distance calls made to outside numbers that fall within the local dialing radius of a Hitachi Consulting office automatically get routed over the IP network, bypassing the long-distance carrier. Employees don’t have to remember which numbers qualify, or use any special access methods.

“We didn’t anticipate any financial savings on long distance when we installed the ShoreTel system,” says Shisko. “We were thinking about a single numbering plan, a single management view, mobility, and so on.” Since the spinoff from the former parent, Hitachi Consulting has reduced the per-employee charges for long distance each month from \$24 to \$3—which does include a 50% drop in long-distance rates.

“We have been saving \$10,000 to \$20,000 per month, every month, since we installed the ShoreTel system,” sums up Shisko.