

SHORETEL DESIGNS VOIP BLUEPRINT FOR ARCHITECTURE FIRM

After introducing the ShoreTel VoIP system into the MBAJ environment, this North Carolina architecture firm gained multiple voice networking features, happier customers, and sizable cost savings.



Challenge:

Architecture firm MBAJ had offices scattered across the state of North Carolina and many highly mobile employees. Needing immediate answers to questions ranging from permit issues to paint color, MBAJ decided to turn to VoIP.

Solution:

A ShoreTel IP telephony system provided MBAJ with the needed distributed flexibility and an easy to use system. The ShoreTel system was deployed across three locations handling over 50 users.

Benefits:

By embracing the packetized voice revolution and introducing the ShoreTel VoIP system into the firm, MBAJ gained a boost in productivity, an increase in cost savings including a 60% reduction in long distance charges, and greater customer satisfaction by enabling employees to respond quicker to customer calls. ShoreTel also gave MBAJ the flexibility to transition to VoIP at its own pace. With features such as tandem trunking and coordinated dialing, MBAJ was able to migrate to IP telephony in stages, leveraging its existing investment and investing capital expenditures as needed.

Architects work hard to make sure structures are built on strong foundations, all the while juggling customer requirements, external issues beyond their control and a driving need for fast response times-to clients, contractors and supervisors.

That's why architecture firm MBAJ turned to ShoreTel and Voice over IP. With offices scattered across the state of North Carolina and lots of highly mobile employees, MBAJ needed the distributed flexibility of ShoreTel's VoIP solution set. The firm sought a system that was easy to use-for its end-users and for the IT administrators. Throw in best-of-class management, and you can see why MBAJ opted for ShoreTel.

MBAJ specializes in the educational and public sectors. The firm is based in Shelby, NC, in the western part of the state, with two branch offices in Charlotte and Raleigh. Rusty Morgan, network administrator for MBAJ, and his team support the voice and data needs of about 50 users. These are mostly architects who require the immediacy that VoIP delivers, whether to check permit issues and zoning guidelines to the slightest design change that affects window placement, paint color, or plumbing lines.

"ShoreTel really gets the demands of a fast paced, distributed enterprise like ours," says Morgan. "We've got multiple architects in the field at any given moment who need immediate communication with our offices and with their clients. VoIP is a great way satisfy my users and our clients communication needs."

MBAJ OPTS FOR SHORETEL AND VoIP

MBAJ knew an upgrade to ShoreTel would lead to major benefits for the company. There was plenty of room for improvement over the creaky old Omega PBX that had outlasted its predicted lifecycle. The PBX's age made service calls increasingly difficult, Morgan explained, and it lacked voice mail and other features that had come to be standard for voice networking in the new millennium.

The company looked at a couple of VoIP options. Among the ShoreTel competitors MBAJ considered was Cisco Systems. While Cisco's VoIP technology looked complete, it wasn't cheap. Case in point: New VoIP telephone handsets would have been required with the Cisco approach, and that can get costly when you have 50 (or more) users to upgrade.

Luckily, that's not the sort of wholesale change out that comes with ShoreTel VoIP implementations. "There is no need to buy expensive IP phones, because any standard phone will work with ShoreTel," Morgan says.



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ShoreTel gave MBAJ the flexibility to transition to VoIP at its own pace. MBAJ wasn't forced to rip out all its wiring or throw out its current handsets. With features such as tandem trunking and coordinated dialing, MBAJ was able to migrate to IP telephony in stages, leveraging its existing investment and investing capital expenditures as needed.

To cover its three offices, MBAJ installed two ShoreGear T1s, six ShoreGear 24s and the associated server software. The six ShoreGear™ Voice Switches handle the underlying call management and ensure that MBAJ has reliable voice service and unified communications across the firm's three locations.

SHORETEL BRINGS MBAJ INTO THE FUTURE

MBAJ expected ShoreTel and VoIP to improve business on multiple fronts. Long distance calls and expensive private lines at MBAJ were gobbling up budget dollars like crazy. MBAJ's antiquated PBX lacked features that users have come to expect as standard. And customers were experiencing wait times when trying to contact MBAJ employees in real time. By embracing the packetized voice revolution and introducing the ShoreTel VoIP system into the firm, MBAJ gained a boost in productivity, an increase in cost savings, and greater customer satisfaction.

The ShoreTel voice system integrates with standard desktop features that deliver a new set of communication capabilities to MBAJ employees. They can listen to their voice mail, for example, through their Microsoft Outlook e-mail application. As Morgan explains, a user clicks on a tape recorder icon to play any incoming messages. They can also click-to-call by scrolling through a list of company names or typing the first few letters of a name to quickly locate a contact. “ShoreTel's unified messaging allows our employees to respond more quickly to our customers,” says Morgan.

ShoreTel's CallManager saves employees time by identifying callers automatically with an Outlook screen pop. “We can identify callers as clients or solicitors, which makes our employees more productive, because they don't get tied up in sales calls.”

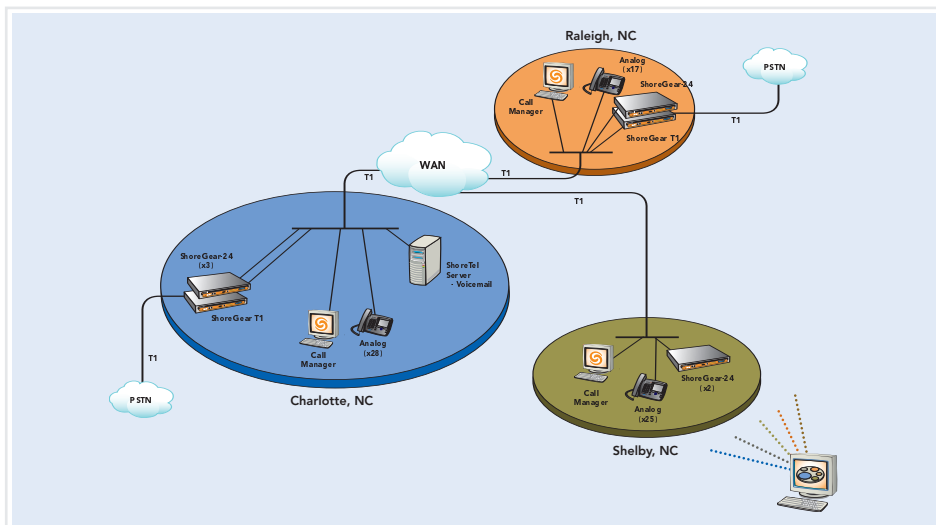
With ShoreTel's Call Manager features, MBAJ has raised its level of customer service. For the first time, MBAJ employees had voice mail, call forwarding, and six-way conference calling. Architects, project managers, and assistants can respond quickly to customer calls and stay on top of project details whether they are in the office or offsite. With automatic call forwarding, MBAJ employees can transfer calls to their cell phones when they are working offsite. “The ability to forward a phone call to cell phone means the client can reach the architect much more easily,” Morgan says.

The ShoreTel VoIP system upgraded MBAJ from three-way conference calling to six-way conference calling. When MBAJ needs to collaborate with multiple parties to move a project forward, ShoreTel's VoIP system's six-way conference calling allows everyone to interact. Conference calls become even more productive because participants can share files such as building plans, licenses, and budget projections. “Now we can get everyone you need on a call to discuss any construction issue,” says Morgan.

All these features and others enhance communications with customers and within the company. In fact, inter-office communication has greatly improved since the company implemented the ShoreTel VoIP system.



Employees have four-digit dialing and the ability to transfer, conference, pick up, park and intercom between sites. Connections to the right person are faster, contributing to individual and overall productivity.



MBAJ deployed ShoreTel to three locations.

"By adding ShoreTel in each office, MBAJ was able to get more for the buck in recurring telecom charges."

COST SAVINGS

MBAJ has realized cost savings across a number of line items. "Six-way conferencing allows us to do most, if not all, of our conference calling in-house," Morgan says. "This should save us some money compared to using a third-party conferencing provider."

MBAJ has experienced a 60 percent reduction in long distance charges, due to all the inter-office calls now being routed across its private VoIP network that spans the 225 miles between Shelby, Charlotte and Raleigh. "Being able to make local calls to Raleigh from Charlotte and Shelby was a big cost savings?" Morgan says.

By adding ShoreTel in each office, MBAJ was able to get more for the buck in recurring telecom charges. The firm was paying for two 56Kbps lines from Charlotte to both Shelby and Raleigh. The costs saved from introducing VoIP allowed MBAJ to upgrade the two lines to full T1s (1.5 megabits per second), more than 25 times the bandwidth of the 56Kbps lines.

Morgan points out that the T1s aren't just for VoIP—they also permit extensive sharing of an e-mail server and a single point of access to the Internet. "The T1s allow access to all three file servers from any office, which also makes life much better," Morgan adds. "This lets us function as a single office."

MANAGEMENT, RELIABILITY, AND SCALABILITY

The centralized ShoreTel system makes managing the VoIP system much easier for Morgan and his team. Adds, deletes, and changes can be made from one interface, and changes don't require a call to or visit from ShoreTel.



“Since deploying the ShoreTel system five years ago, MBAJ voice service has been completely reliable.”

In the past with the PBX, every request and update was an ordeal. MBAJ could not manage the systems internally without waiting for support from the PBX representative. That's all changed with ShoreTel, says Morgan. His team can manage the changes without requesting outside assistance.

As for downtime, it's been a non-issue. Since deploying the ShoreTel system five years ago, MBAJ voice service has been completely reliable. In the ShoreTel call control architecture, switches communicate with each other as peers and distribute call processing across the network. If one switch should go offline, its counterparts automatically pick up the call-processing load so services are never interrupted. That eliminates single-point failures that more traditional voice systems have trouble matching. “We've never experienced any downtime,” Morgan says. “I think that's pretty impressive.”

Morgan expects ShoreTel will continue to maintain its uptime track record, even as the company adds more employees and increases capacity demands. With five different switches to choose from, ShoreTel equipment can be incrementally scaled to thousands of ports as needs dictate. Adding new ports with another switch is easy due to ShoreGear's plug-and-play nature. The ShoreWare Director automatically “discovers” the new switch and adds it to the VoIP system. “We know that when we're ready to expand, we will have phone connectivity very quickly via the ShoreTel system,” he adds.

SERVICE-MINDED VOICE

It's easy to see why VoIP has been so successful for MBAJ. The firm goes to great lengths to demonstrate to its clients that it values them and their input. Maybe that's during the weekly conference calls to go over the status of any project it has on its books. Maybe it's getting patched through to the project architect who's onsite consulting with sub-contractors. Or maybe it's a promptly returned phone call after a client's urgent voice mail. The ShoreTel VoIP solutions ensure timely, efficient communication, with more flexibility and as much robustness as any voice network available.

Morgan bottom-lines it for the army of architects he supports: “Voice over IP just makes communication with clients a whole lot easier.”