



## SELF-STORAGE LEADER LOOKS TO SHORETEL TO HELP IT WIN MORE BUSINESS AND LOWER TOTAL COST OF SYSTEM OWNERSHIP

Sovran Self Storage Deploys VoIP Telephony System and Realizes Immediate Business Gains and Cost Savings



### Challenge:

Sovran's existing system was outdated, unreliable and slow, which resulted in lost business. The company also had to outsource the management of the system, which cost upwards of \$20,000 a year.

### Solution:

ShoreTel provided the self-storage leader with an end-to-end solution, including telephony switches, VoIP and analog telephones, and management software.

### Benefits:

- Savings of \$20,000 a year in management costs.
- Significant improvements in call answer rates, which results in more business for Sovran.
- System functionality provides call center agents with an overabundance of information to help them provide exceptional customer service.

Sovran Self Storage, Inc. (NYSE: SSS) is a fully integrated, self-administered and self-managed real estate investment trust (REIT) that acquires, manages, and constructs self storage properties. The company, which employs approximately 900 people, owns and/or operates over 280 self storage facilities encompassing over 17 million square feet, making it one of the five largest self-storage companies in the United States. Sovran operates its stores under the trade name Uncle Bob's Self Storage® and serves over 125,000 customers in 21 states. The company was founded in 1982 and its headquarters is located in Buffalo, New York.

### SOVRAN NEEDS IMPROVED TELEPHONY SYSTEM TO WIN MORE BUSINESS

In the summer of 2004, Sovran was faced with a telephone system that was unable to meet the company's current needs. The system was difficult to use and began breaking down often—both of which lost Sovran a lot of business, and was in dire need of an upgrade in order to meet the company's future needs. The existing system was also costly to maintain since everything—including moves, adds and changes—had to be handled by Sovran's service provider partner. Sovran decided to look for a solution that could be managed in-house, which would save time and money and also prepare the company for its anticipated growth. Therefore, the company's priorities when considering new systems included ease of use and maintenance, scalability, and reliability.

Sovran reviewed products from top vendors, including ShoreTel. Traditional PBX systems were not a fit for Sovran since they would require outsourced maintenance. After Sovran reviewed solutions carefully, saw demonstrations, and talked to customers of each vendor, the company chose ShoreTel because its solution proved to offer the most robust feature set in a voice over IP (VoIP) system.

“The technology of the ShoreTel system was much more advanced than that of the other solutions,” said Randy Hillman, customer care manager for Sovran Self Storage. “The ease of use and feature robustness resulted in the best value overall. We're excited to have found a system that will help us tie together the home office with the retail stores seamlessly, allowing stores to operate as if they were part of the corporate call center.”



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**– Randy Hillman**  
Customer Care Manager,  
Sovran Self Storage, Inc

## SHORETEL PROVIDES END-TO-END SOLUTION

In the summer of 2005, ShoreTel provided Sovran with four ShoreGear-T1 switches, which provide higher density trunking using T1 or PRI signaling. (The ShoreGear-T1 can also be used as a gateway to legacy PBX systems.) Several ShoreGear-120/24 switches support the company’s 40 ShoreTel IP and 90 analog telephones. ShoreWare Director is used to manage the solution, make configuration changes, and handle moves, adds, and changes.

### Faster Response Time Increases Business

With ShoreTel’s Contact Center being used for its 35-agent call center, customer service and response time have been vastly improved. Sovran customers appreciate quicker response and a more personalized approach.

“In this business, you have literally only seconds to answer an incoming call,” said Hillman. “We needed to increase the efficiency on answering calls quickly and also enhance customer service. People find self-storage solutions in the Yellow Pages most often, and they start dialing—if they don’t get a pickup right away, they quickly move onto the next number. We needed to eliminate those abandoned calls. The percentage of calls we were answering was in the low 90s, and we wanted to be at 95%. ShoreTel has brought us up to 96.5% or better. That’s the bottom line because if a call is lost, you lose a customer.”

Call Center also allows Sovran to match its staff to levels of service, quickly identify and solve resource issues, and give agents the tools they need to deliver quality service. Because each call is delivered with a great deal more information than before, Sovran call center agents are armed with helpful insight that enhances the service they deliver to each potential customer.

“Our agents get a huge amount of info on each call—before even answering,” said Hillman. “Because they see that information immediately on their screen as the call comes in, they are that much quicker to respond. It literally comes down to the difference in time it takes to answer—before you had to answer a handset, now it’s a simple mouse-click. That’s how sensitive our business is to call answering times. ShoreTel has made us more successful with that capability alone—not to mention all of the other features we enjoy.”

Sovran has definitely improved its customer service by utilizing the ShoreTel system, and specifically Contact Center. “We’ve seen measurable improvements as a result of the ShoreTel implementation in the way of compliments from customers,” said Hillman. “That gets around and people start telling their friends about Sovran and Uncle Bob’s Self Storage.”

## SIMPLIFIED MANAGEMENT LOWERS SOVRAN’S COST OF OWNERSHIP

ShoreWare Director, ShoreTel’s browser-based management interface, allows Sovran operations staff to gain access to the system from anywhere on the network. Through this browser, every site and feature can be managed, including the 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. Then, the centralized database and voice



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switches are automatically updated, and for the user, a new mailbox is created and the automated attendant dial-by-name and number feature and online directories are updated—all in a matter of seconds.

With ShoreWare Director, Sovran saves significant time and money on employee moves, adds and changes because with the previous solution, management was outsourced. This meant the company had to rely heavily on its management provider, which took a lot of time and money. "Maintenance and moves/adds/changes are really easy and we're saving a minimum of \$20,000 a year on maintenance alone," said Hillman. "The ability to do everything in-house also makes us more effective and efficient—we no longer have to wait for our provider's schedule to clear up to have changes made."

## **EMPLOYEES EMPOWERED WITH ROBUST FEATURE SET**

The ShoreTel system, integrated tightly with Sovran's Microsoft Outlook application, provides integrated messaging, such as directory dialing, contact screen pop, and calendar integration. This means that in addition to ShoreTel's highly functional telephones, Sovran employees get unified messaging so voice mail shows up in their email inbox, desktop call control allows them to control the way their phones work, and features like Follow Me Find Me allows them to have calls track them down wherever they are—at their desk, on their cell phone, or at home if they choose.

With the ShoreTel solution, Sovran employees spend less time navigating complex telephone systems and more time performing critical, revenue-producing tasks. The friendly, graphical interface of Call Manager provides easy access to sophisticated features, including on-the-fly conferencing and document sharing. ShoreTel Call Manager also includes SoftPhone, a utility that delivers telephony capabilities to any PC. With calls directed to a laptop and a headset plugged into the USB port, employees can work from anywhere.

Sovran receptionists enjoy an even higher level of functionality with ShoreTel's Operator Call Manager, which provides them with critical information necessary for exceptional customer service. For example, when the phone rings, a call-routing log displays for the receptionist the caller's entire experience within the system. Before transferring callers, the call-transfer screen displays information about who is available and who is already on the phone. With this unprecedented level of information, operators not only connect callers faster than ever, but also give them the highest level of professional service. Also, dynamic, online directories eliminate paper directories – which are usually out of date anyway and not usually available online. With the complete company at their fingertips, along with knowledge about who is available and where a caller has already been sent, the receptionist can transfer using a simple drag-and-drop tool, to the most appropriate person—to their extension, cell phone or even their home phone.

"With the ShoreTel solution, we can see on the screen exactly what store they are calling about by the number they dialed," said Hillman. "We're



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also able to share voice mail messages with appropriate people, without the risk of human error in relaying a message. You simply forward the voice mail via email to multiple people. It’s great to be able to share both compliments and complaints with those who need to know about them. These features are exceptionally powerful tools for a business like ours. Customers get answers faster and we win more business.”

## **POISED FOR CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER GROWTH**

Sovran looks forward to its anticipated growth and knows the ShoreTel system will be able to keep up, without a doubt. The company plans to integrate the system with some of its own proprietary applications and is working closely with ShoreTel to prepare for that. The bottom line so far is that Sovran’s business has improved by simply installing the ShoreTel system: Money has been saved, time is used most effectively, and more business is won.

“We love the ShoreTel system,” said Hillman. “We intend to move forward with ShoreTel for a long time to come.”