



Industry: Professional Services/Construction

Installation: 18 locations, 27 ShoreGear voice switches, 300 ShorePhone IP telephones

Date of Install: June 2005

Challenge:

The Van Metre Companies had an aging telecommunications system that wasn't easy to use and lacked the features the company needed for effective communications among its facilities in the Washington, D.C. area. Van Metre was running out of capacity and was out of phone extensions.

Solution:

The building company deployed ShoreTel's IP telephony system in multiple locations, with help from ShoreTel's local partner. Van Metre is using about 300 ShoreTel IP phones, three ShoreGear T1 switches, 13 ShoreGear 60/12 switches, 11 ShoreGear 40/8 switches, and two voicemail servers.

Benefits:

The ShoreTel solution gives Van Metre centralized management of its telecom infrastructure, including the ability to monitor the entire network from one desktop. Employees can more quickly and easily communicate with each other regardless of location, and customers can more easily reach the people they need at Van Metre. Additional benefits are cost savings for long-distance calling, infrastructure and maintenance.

LUXURY HOMEBUILDER MAKES SHORETEL THE FOUNDATION OF ITS BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

Benefits include improved employee communications, easier management and cost savings at The Van Metre Companies

"The ability for our staff to quickly communicate with other staff members is important to our business because we're spread over many sites," says Mike Saunders, Director of IT at The Van Metre Companies, a residential development and homebuilding business. Effective communication among Van Metre's staff of 500 is critical because the company is known for its highly personalized service as well as innovative home design and excellent craftsmanship.

The Van Metre Companies is a family-owned business founded in 1955. The company includes Van Metre Homes, which develops new residential communities and builds nearly 600 new homes annually in highly desirable locations in the greater Washington, D.C. area. Van Metre also develops, builds and manages apartment communities, commercial and retail space; provides mortgage and title services; and builds custom homes through its Marquis Custom Homes brand.

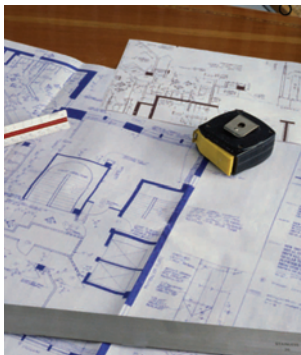
The company has its headquarters in Burke, VA and operates 30 branch offices throughout the Washington, D.C. area. While some of these facilities operate independently of each other, effective interaction and collaboration among all of the Van Metre sites is critical to the company's success.

Until 2005, Van Metre relied on an aging Toshiba phone system at its headquarters. The PBX was running out of capacity and the company was completely out of new phone extensions. Many employees found the Toshiba phones hard to use, and the phone system lacked features that the company needed, says Saunders. Paper-based telephone directories quickly fell out of date. Employees on the road had limited access to e-mail and other information. Plus, making any changes to the Toshiba PBX was costly and slow because moves, adds and changes required the assistance of a third-party systems integrator.

BUILDING AN IP NETWORK

Van Metre considered an upgrade of its existing phone system, but that would have been prohibitively expensive. Another option was to migrate to a new IP PBX. Van Metre also expected to gain the benefits of new calling features, such as extension dialing among the sites, which would make communications more efficient. An IP PBX would also prove to be easier to manage. And the company expected to reap a cost savings because their own staff could handle its own moves, adds and changes.

Van Metre conducted a thorough evaluation of IP PBXs, evaluating systems from Cisco, Avaya, Altigen, Panasonic, Toshiba and ShoreTel. The company narrowed its choice to Altigen and ShoreTel. While Van Metre liked the



easy-to-use interfaces of both solutions, it was concerned about the remote survivability and overall reliability of the Altigen system. Van Metre was concerned that if servers crashed, it would lose its communications trunks at remote sites. Plus, the Altigen system ran on Windows, which raised security concerns.

Van Metre opted for the ShoreTel system. ShoreTel is a fully distributed IP phone system with no single point of failure. Call control is distributed among the voice switches, and voice applications including voicemail and automated attendant run on standard server hardware anywhere in the IP network. Plus, ShoreTel runs on VXworks, the leading embedded real-time operating system from Wind River Systems, so there's none of the security and stability issues associated with server-based systems. With ShoreTel, an administrator can centrally monitor the status of all phone equipment in its network, a capability that Van Metre required in its upgraded system.

The building company began implementing the ShoreTel phone system in June 2005. Van Metre has deployed ShoreTel equipment at 18 of its sites, including its corporate headquarters, Saunders says. ShoreTel's reseller, in the Washington, D.C. area, helped Van Metre with the installations and provides ongoing maintenance for the equipment. In addition, Van Metre has rolled out 300 ShoreTel IP phones, including a mix of IP 210, IP 530, and IP 560 phones, as well as analog cordless phones. Other equipment from ShoreTel includes three ShoreGear T1 switches, 13 ShoreGear 60/12 switches, 11 ShoreGear 40/8 switches, and two voicemail servers.

Among the features of the ShoreTel IP phone system that Van Metre uses is Personal Call Manager, which enables easy management of the phone system. Locating employees no matter which office location they're in is simple with ShoreTel's Find-me, Follow-me capability. Traveling employees use SoftPhone, which gives mobile computer users access to enterprise calling features from the road. Van Metre's IT staff also uses ShoreWare Director for maintenance and support.

When apartment residents call in with a problem, the issue can be quickly distributed to the right people with the ShoreTel phone system, which has improved productivity and responsiveness. For instance, apartment sites managed by Van Metre have a general voicemail box that can send voicemail to an e-mail group, so building maintenance issues can be more quickly resolved.

Because Van Metre employees don't always have phone access at remote sites, they are heavy users of e-mail notification for voicemail. With their ShoreTel phone system, they can easily see if they have voicemails using their handhelds and know the urgency of the matter.

MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Saunders says one of the key benefits of the ShoreTel solution are the centralized management it enables, including the ability to monitor Van Metre's complete phone system from a single location. With this capability, a systems administrator can easily see if something is wrong anywhere in the system—down to an individual phone. The centralized management has made overseeing telecommunications a lot simpler for the company's five-person IT department.

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“The ease of management of the overall phone infrastructure is one thing that stands out about the ShoreTel system,” Saunders says. “Having one login and one graphical interface to view network operations is a great benefit.” Saunders also likes the fact that Van Metre can set up a remote site that has only a few phones and an Internet connection, but not have to install a switch. “This makes it fast and easy to implement a new site and provides added flexibility,” he says.

With the new IP phone system, users can more quickly and easily communicate with co-workers regardless of their location. Van Metre has four-digit dialing between all sites, enabling more accurate and efficient communications. Prior to the upgrade, the company had to maintain paper phone lists that were quickly outdated. Now users just type a name and press “enter” to call someone using Personal Call Manager. Or they can easily dial by name on the telephone keypad.

Customers also have an easier time reaching the people they need at Van Metre because customer-care operators use the Operator Call Manager feature to quickly get calls to the right people, whether they’re onsite or off-site.

The ShoreTel phone system helps Van Metre keep control over long distance costs. Van Metre requires all users to use account codes for long distance calling, so users have to enter passwords to make long distance calls. In sites with public phones, they can assign these phones for internal use only and require account codes, which is good for security. They can generate reports by individual numbers to monitor long distance usage from their sites.

Infrastructure costs are lower because the company has simplified wiring in its buildings. The company also expects savings from reduced systems maintenance.