VIYU

'SKY'S THE LIMIT' FOR LODGING HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT WITH CISCO UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS

OVERVIEW

Lodging Hospitality Management, based in St. Louis, operates 17 hotels, eight restaurants and two commercial properties. Its upscale portfolio includes both independent and brand-name hotels.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LODGING HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT
- Hospitality
- St. Louis, Missouri, USA
- 17 hotel properties

BUSINESS CHALLENGE
- Aging PBX infrastructure
- Reliability
- High maintenance and telecommunication costs
  Lack of calling features

NETWORK SOLUTION
- Cisco Business Edition 6000
- Cisco ISR G2s
- Cisco Catalyst LAN Switches

BUSINESS RESULTS
- Rapid deployment for special events or new phone lines
- Massive call capacity
- Seamless reliability
- Staff loves user-friendly interface

CHALLENGE

When you're responsible for selling tickets to one of the most popular holiday events in St. Louis, you can't take chances with your phone system.

Lodging Hospitality Management (LHM) runs 17 hotels in the area, one of which serves as the epicenter for the annual Polar Express train rides out of Union Station. Inspired by the classic children's book, the event transports families on a magical trip to the "North Pole," where they meet Santa and his reindeer, snack on cookies and hot chocolate, and get a souvenir gift.

The management company's legacy PBX phone system, however, wasn't meeting its current business needs. Because of the system's age, LHM couldn't make any changes on its own—it had to work with a vendor to do anything from set up a new extension to change a voicemail greeting for an employee. Regular telecommunications charges were high, not to mention the fact that LHM paid more for maintenance than the switches were worth.

CHALLENGE CONT.

VThe system also wasn't able to interface with newer technology and could take as long as two to three weeks to get up and running after going down. LHM's phone lines also needed the capacity to respond to high volumes of calls, whether they were from guests calling to make room reservations or ordering tickets for the signature Polar Express event.

A single collaboration system would make the phone network easier to manage, improve redundancy, lower maintenance costs and offer more features.

SOLUTION

LHM's long-time partner Viyu Network Solutions architected a Cisco Collaboration solution that included Cisco Business Edition 6000 and ISR G2 routers. The solution was installed on Cisco switching infrastructure that Viyu had previously integrated into all of the hotels. "We have a trust factor with Viyu that's just there," said Jim Conaway, LHM's vice president of IT. "If they tell me something, there's never a doubt."

It was important to have a smooth transition as each hotel moved to the new call manager so that guests didn't experience any disruption. Viyu arranged the initial cutover so a 400-room hotel was able to migrate in a matter of 30 minutes.

Viyu also developed a training program for LHM's staff, but the solution worked so intuitively they didn't end up needing it.

"We were able to walk them through the operations in a few seconds and be done," Conaway said.

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OUTCOME

LHM's staff is able to serve its guests better than ever thanks to Cisco's phone solution. The IT team can deploy new phone lines in mere moments, rapidly expanding its network to accommodate conference attendees, for example. The system is virtually always available, and in the event phone lines go down, it's a matter of hours rather than weeks before they're restored.

"That availability and the ability to adapt to all of those scenarios brings the phones in line with the rest of the IT gear we use across the company," Conaway said.

And the system passed its most major test without a hitch: The phone network tripled its capacity at two sites in just 15 minutes to be able to handle more than 100,000 Polar Express calls in one week. More than 12,000 of those calls came in during just one six-hour period.

In the past it would have taken at least a week to adapt the PBX system for that call volume, but the Cisco solution had the agility to increase capacity, as Conaway put it, "on the fly." LHM can add more phone lines, easily route calls through the network, customize greetings and overall create a much more user-friendly experience for both staff and callers. The event ended up selling out within a week.
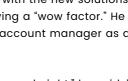
Over the past several years, LHM has transitioned all of its hardware to Cisco.

"It's a result of my experience with the equipment, the quality, the support and the life expectancy," Conaway said. "Cisco proved itself." LHM's staff is thrilled with the new solutions, too, and some even describe them as having a "wow factor." He also counts his relationship with his Cisco account manager as a huge part of the success.

"The improvement is like day and night," he said. "The sky's the limit now."