

CLEAR CREEK TELEPHONE & TELEVISION



OVERVIEW

Operating daily off a telephone system that was well over 15 years old, Clear Creek Telephone & Television located in Oregon City, Oregon, just south of Portland, was facing a crisis with their existing system that left them no choice but to replace it. With a long list of complications that included the inability to find anyone to service the system, to the inability to purchase compatible equipment, Clear Creek T&T, along with their remote location in Redland, had a \$1,000,000 budget when they began their search for a web-centric phone system with VoIP functionality. Because personal interaction with their customers is important to their company philosophy, they wanted a centralized IP PBX hardware appliance that could be answered from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. by a live attendant; however, they also wanted the convenience and flexibility of full integration with their IT infrastructure to provide customizable options, email notification, auto-forwarding, overflow support, etc.

Unfamiliar at the time with Digium's products, Clear Creek's IT manager, Rick Lundh, began the research process for a system that met their needs and expectations. "We are a small company, but obviously as a telephone and cable/internet provider, we are also a high technology company. We wanted a robust system that required minimal support, and was easy to use." What's more, as a telephone service provider, they were open to expanding their own product and service offerings down the road. Finding a product they could recommend to their business clientele became a secondary consideration.

Rick conducted a great deal of research, and put out a number of requests for more information - one of which was Digium. He spoke to a ShoreTel representative and was impressed with the features of their product and the price, but the more customizable features, options, and plug-ins they added to meet the needs of their company, the cost began to rise, threatening to exceed their budget.

In the meantime, Digium contacted a partner in the region. Vince Preece of NP Information Systems, located in the Seattle vicinity, called Rick to discuss his phone system requirements. After speaking with Vince, Rick realized the Switchvox product had many of ShoreTel's a la carte features, built into the single web-centric, IP PBX with integrated Switchboard, and built into its base-price cost as well. Digium was looking good!

Out with the Old, In with the New Switchvox: West Coast Telephone, Cable, & Internet Provider “Loves It!”

CHALLENGE

Forming a co-op in the early 1900s, for more than 100 years, Clear Creek Telephone & Television has provided telephone service to businesses and residents of Oregon City and Redland, Oregon. Today they provide cable and Internet services as well. One of the long-term visions of the small company is to offer a telephone product to their business customers, similar to the one they purchased and use themselves. Their recent search for a stable and versatile telephone system had a current and a future place in their final decision.

Their old telephone system was 17 years old and presented a number of problems. Foremost was the system's constant need for maintenance and repair, seconded by the retirement and failing health of an ex-Clear Creek employee who was the only known technician familiar enough with the system to work on it. “Never mind finding someone else who would work on it,” Lundh says, “it was nearly impossible to find anyone else who could work on it.”

The third problem resulted from an inability to replace any part of the Comdial phone equipment because it has been discontinued. “Forget breaking a handset or the appliance itself, because we couldn't find a new one to replace it,” Lundh says, “We just had to make do without.” As the nursery rhyme goes... “And then there were none” ... Clear Creek T&T were running out of phones!

Finally, integration into any of their existing IT applications was impossible. As a standalone system, it offered voice mail with very limited features. Programming your messaging was complicated and required a small booklet of steps. Furthermore, Clear Creek was essentially using a party-line method of conference calling, which occurred frequently between the Oregon City office and the Redland office, because they did not have the capability to teleconference.

SOLUTION

Putting aside ShoreTel to look more closely at Switchvox, Lundh says he and Preece got serious. “We did some preliminary work and decided to buy POE (power over Ethernet) switches into which to connect our phones because it saved the company money. We saw a demo of the Switchvox product, which was impressive and we made some preliminary test calls. Essentially, it was a team effort between NP Information Systems and us to make sure we bought an efficient product that met all of our qualifications.”

Clear Creek purchased a Switchvox AA355 with 30 Polycom 670 Expansion Module IP phones designed to deliver voice or video over a data network. All employees have the same phones so replacements are a flash and the expansion module allows for additional phones. “We completely abandoned our POTS (plain old telephone service) lines and now we run everything off DSL with no negative effects,” Lundh says.

Integrated into the company IT infrastructure, with the Switchvox switchboard, everything the receptionist needs is a click away. “The intuitive Switchboard interface in Switchvox was a major deciding factor,” says Lundh. “What is nice about the Switchvox system is how easy it was for our employees to learn it. With the IVR tree option, our receptionist had no problems learning how to customize individual greetings and she was able to immediately route calls without hassle from the main IP PBX.”

In fact, the attendant can drag and drop calls, chat, update the CRM system, and send emails. They have auto-forwarding to call queues with overflow support and Clear Creek added an onscreen Notifier Suite plug-in for Microsoft Outlook integration that provides onscreen pop-ups of incoming calls.

Completely customized by each user, the receptionist can see every extension on the system. She can see busy lamps that show her when other users are on the phone; and users can customize presence notifications to let everyone know they in a meeting and when they expect to return. It runs on many web browsers, so there is no need to run or install a separate application.

“In terms of cost, this was not the cheapest system we considered,” Lundh admits. “But I believe that by the time we purchased another system and added on all the individual items not offered with their hardware appliance, but that are already included in the Switchvox and the Digium price, any viable alternative would have been five times the price we paid for Switchvox.”

RESULTS

“I think it came down to the product itself,” says Vince Preece. “Rick really shopped this product before making a decision and it came down to the feature set, cost, manageability, and ease of use. Switchvox won across the board.”

“We have had the Digium product up and running for five months and the phones are great,” Lundh says, “The system is stable with no negatives or problems. The employees were naturally afraid of the change because any major transition usually has a learning curve. We experienced none of that. We love it!”

Digium's vision is a world based upon open communications.

Our mission is to transform the way businesses acquire and operate their communications systems through the application of open source software.



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