

CNET NETWORKS CALLS ON IP TELEPHONY TO CONSOLIDATE PHONE SYSTEM

ShoreTel system provides cost savings, increased employee productivity and high quality of service.



Challenge:

CNET Networks was consolidating several offices into a single headquarters in San Francisco, which initiated the phone system upgrade, that later expanded to all 1,600 employees.

Solution:

A ShoreTel IP telephony system was deployed to 1,600 employees across seven offices in the U.S. and one location in London. The distributed phone system provides local voice mail, auto attendant features as well as a converged conference bridge and IP phones with an easy-to-use interface.

Benefits:

- Realized productivity gains for workers and IT staff through one-click dialing to any CNET location worldwide, integrated audio conferencing and easy maintenance of the phone system.
- Payback on ShoreTel achieved immediately by eliminating the need for additional cabling in the new San Francisco headquarters and selling the old PBX.
- More than doubled usage of conference calling while cutting costs tenfold by bringing conference calling in-house.

One of the top destinations to get the latest high-tech news and information is CNET Networks. The San Francisco-based media firm delivers a variety of information on all things technology, from consumer product reviews to breaking news and interviews with top industry executives. Some of CNET Networks' well-known brands include ZDNet, Download.com, TV.com and mySimon.com.

Although CNET covers all aspects of the technology world, the company faced its own hi-tech challenge a few years ago when it was in the process of selecting a new phone system. So it makes sense that a forward-looking company would turn to cutting-edge technology-in this case IP telephony-as the best choice for the future.

THE INSIDE SCOOP ON VoIP

About four years ago, CNET was in the process of consolidating a number of offices into a single headquarters location in San Francisco, which also meant consolidating into a single phone system. "We knew that whatever we chose, we would have to stick with it for the next 10 years," says Don McGill, director of client services at CNET.

Since the initial set-up in San Francisco, CNET has branched out and expanded the system to include six other CNET locations in the U.S.- Chicago, Los Angeles, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York.

Then, about 18 months ago, the company went even further and implemented the ShoreTel IP telephony system in its London office. The international deployment went as smoothly as the first site, according to McGill. "Deployment was really straightforward," he says. "Now when I talk to my counterparts in London, it sounds like they are right next door. They have all the same features, but they are 6,000 miles away."

Today, more than 1,600 CNET employees across the United States and London rely on the ShoreTel IP PBX to track the fast-moving world of hi-tech news and products.

McGill says prior to the company's consolidation, CNET was using a traditional PBX from Avaya and had considered IP telephony solutions from Cisco and Nortel. But for its big move, the company selected ShoreTel for its IP PBX.

McGill adds that CNET has a small telecom staff-which operates separately from the staff that handles the company's well-known Web sites and internal IP network-and they needed a phone system that was easy to manage.



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–Don McGill

Director of Client Services, CNET

A RELIABLE OPERATION

CNET worked directly with ShoreTel to initially set up 400 users in the San Francisco headquarters on the new IP PBX. McGill and his telecom coworker, found it very easy to get everyone up and running on the ShoreTel phone system.

In the past six months, CNET has switched from analog phones to ShoreTel's ShorePhone 530 IP phones. “We have rolled out 400 IP phones so far,” says McGill, “The ShorePhone 530s are really good phones, and they add to the ease of maintenance and support,” McGill says. He adds that the plug-and-play capability of the ShoreTel IP Phones greatly simplifies the installation process.

The ergonomically designed ShorePhone 530 not only provides an easy-to-use handset for users, but also includes a number of capabilities that go above and beyond a traditional digital phone. These include enhanced information about the status of the phone number being dialed, calling someone by typing in the first few letters of their name and allowing users to assign their extensions to phones in other enterprise locations. ShoreTel Call Manager integrates with Microsoft Outlook, so that users gain control over voice and e-mail messages.

The ShoreTel SoftPhone brings phone capabilities to a desktop or a laptop giving workers access to their enterprise telephony features from wherever they are working. McGill says, “A number of our employees work from home or travel on business, and we've found that the SoftPhone is quite nice. The SoftPhone is plug-and-play.” He adds that employees use traditional “hard” phones in the office and then use soft phones on the road or from home offices.

POWERFUL APPLICATIONS

CNET employees also take advantage of the presence capability within the ShoreWare Operator Call Manager, which allows users to know who is on the phone, who is in a meeting and who is out of the office. This information greatly aids in routing calls in the most efficient manner, even across multiple sites. For example, an operator who receives an incoming call receives real-time information during a call transfer showing if the employee is in or not and even who they are talking to on the phone at that instant. Employees can even leave notes through the system for the operator with specific information on their whereabouts and where to send their calls.

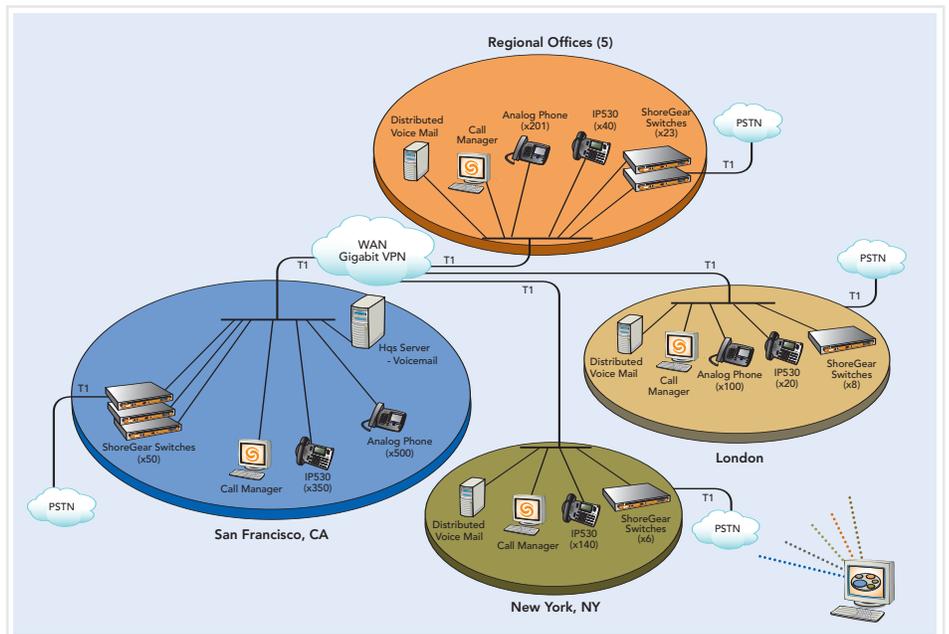
Employees who travel can have their phone calls follow them - whether they travel to other CNET locations, their home offices or to their cell phones. ShoreTel's Follow Me Find Me allows callers to find employees on their cell phones, something CNET salespeople particular appreciate, according to McGill.

The auto attendant and hunt and workgroup capabilities also ease life for CNET. With an auto-attendant callers can use menu-driven options to take care of billing and other customer-care issues. “We have a customer service group and an IT helpdesk group who deal with internal and external customers,” McGill says. The ShoreTel system automatically distributes calls to people in these workgroups.



With offices spanning from the U.S. to London, much of the voice traffic on the CNET network is from office to office. As a distributed organization, CNET is naturally a heavy user of conferencing. “We use a lot of audio conferencing, and as it turns out most of the callers in our offices so we brought the audio conference bridging in-house and use our WAN as the transport,” McGill says. “We have achieved significant cost savings with conferencing and users like the integration.” Conferencing is fully integrated into the ShoreTel IP PBX and can deliver scheduled audio conferences as well as web collaboration and data sharing sessions. The solution includes the ShoreGear Conference Bridge, which supports any number of conferences with from 12 to 96 simultaneous participants, the ShoreWare Conference Manager, a web-based application for arranging and controlling conferences, and the ShoreWare Conference Director, a web-based management tool for setting up and administering conferences.

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CNET deployed ShoreTel to eight locations with 1351 phones.

RELIABLE OPERATION, EASY MANAGEMENT

McGill says that overall his company has experienced very few problems with its VoIP system, mostly due to the reliable nature of ShoreTel's distributed architecture. “We've had occasional problems, such as a server that affects voice mail in one of the offices going down, but the server at headquarters automatically took over for the remote location,” he says.

With ShoreTel, there is no single point of failure for dial tone. Call management is distributed to each and every ShoreGear voice switch, making the system independent of LAN and WAN service interruption. Since the voice switches behave as peers on the network, they deliver a single-system phone system that spans multiple sites, breaking down communications barriers and easing administration.

In the unlikely event of a catastrophe, the ShoreTel system is equipped with multiple levels of failover. If a single ShoreGear voice switch fails, the IP phones associated with the switch automatically home into another voice switch for service. With PSTN failover, if a user makes a multi-site



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extension call and the WAN is down, the system automatically routes out the PSTN. With trunk routing failover, if a user makes an external call with the WAN is down, the system automatically routes the call out the most cost effective, available site. And if a power outage exceeds the duration of the backup system, the ShoreGear voice switch will automatically connect an analog trunk to an analog telephone to ensure dial tone even during catastrophic events.

As CNET hires more employees, adds, moves and changes of phones are accomplished quickly and easily without taxing CNET's telecom staff or needing the assistance of an integrator.

ShoreWare Director allows new users to be added in seconds from anywhere on the network using only a browser. Plug-and-play installation means that IP phones plugged into the network are automatically recognized by the system and configured for immediate service. Even installation of ShoreGear voice switches is plug-and-play.

McGill and his staff can manage all sites from any web browser using ShoreWare Director, including the PBX, voice mail, automated attendant and desktop applications. He can assess system health at a glance with ShoreWare Director's simple icons and color coding - and take action when necessary.

PRODUCTIVITY GAINS AND COST SAVINGS

CNET has definitely reaped many benefits from the ShoreTel deployment-including a return on investment (ROI) from day one. "When we deployed ShoreTel in the new building in San Francisco, we eliminated the need for the typical telephone riser cable which saved about \$100,000 right away," he says. He adds that selling the company's two-year-old Avaya phone system netted the company additional dollars. "When you add everything up, we had payback on the ShoreTel system the day we moved in."

CNET has realized financial savings and productivity gains since switching to ShoreTel's IP telephony system.

On the productivity side, McGill says that the user interface on the ShoreTel ShorePhones is much easier to use than a traditional phone. "People don't dial anymore; they use the Call Manager client to do all the telephone work-which provides call histories, caller ID, and gives employees total control over their calls," he says.

On the financial side, CNET has reaped benefits from using toll bypass and least-cost routing features inherent in IP telephony. "We consolidate our long distance calling to CNET locations that have a dedicated facility to a long distance carrier," McGill says. "If someone in Louisville is going to make a long distance call, it goes from a dedicated facility in San Francisco to get a cheaper rate. All these tweaks that we add on save money, so there is a difference in cost."

Reducing reliance on costly conference calling services was another significant cost savings. When ShoreTel Converged Conferencing was initially installed, CNET used 100,000 minutes per month of calling time for conference calls, which racked up charges \$15,000 to \$16,000 a month. "Now, we've increased the usage to 160,000 conferencing minutes a month, but the costs are down to a couple of thousand dollars."



Beyond the benefits of a better user experience as well as cost savings, McGill says the quality of the IP telephony calls has been excellent. So far, McGill hasn't needed to set up separate virtual LANs (VLANs) or implement quality of service (QoS) for its voice calls.

McGill also says that since the IP PBX was installed four years ago, ShoreTel has continually made improvements to it. "We didn't choose ShoreTel because it was VoIP," he says. "We liked the feature set and the way it was presented on the PCs rather than having to remember the esoteric codes on the phones. ShoreTel is straightforward to use for both users and for telecom staff. The fact that it was VoIP was just an added benefit."

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