

Dimensions

CASE STUDY: CHARITY



The Need

Upgrade end-of-life PBX's and make the move to VoIP

The Solution

Implement a nationwide, centralised VoIP phone system and Wide Area Network

Situations and challenges

Ray Fletcher is Head of IT and assisted technology for Dimensions, the not-for-profit organisation that is the UK's second largest provider of support to people with learning difficulties.

"Dimensions is all about supporting people and that means we need to make it easy for them to contact us, including by phone, and the move to VoIP is part of achieving this. We have got over 250 sites all across the UK – some large, some small – and historically, they've always had their own phone systems.

However, as part of our ongoing mission to continually improve our service, we wanted a nationwide, centralised phone system and the improved call management that it would provide, but still maintaining a 'local' feel.

It's important to us to ensure that calls are answered quickly, or can be easily transferred between offices. We were also finding the costs of operating our existing PSTN telephone switches high and many of these switches were also coming to the end of their natural lives."

Why managed VoIP?

"We could see the attraction of VoIP, because it could help us to achieve the goal of a single nationwide telephone network, as well as being cost effective compared to traditional telephony.

We chose a managed CallPort VoIP service provided by 8el, who already provide us with a Wide Area Network (WAN) and host our servers. It made sense to make use of this existing infrastructure and to use the available bandwidth for our voice services too."

The benefits

"We could instantly see that adding the VoIP service onto our existing WAN infrastructure would prove very cost effective. The additional hardware we needed was minimal, mainly consisting of providing employees with IP phones. It was a relatively low cost for a high gain, because it instantly provided us with a sophisticated set of call features."

"While cost savings are important, it is essential to us that any systems we use – and that includes telephone services – must not be a barrier to communicating with the people we support. With the new (8el) VoIP service in place, we have the same level of functionality regardless of the size of site and a phone service that is flexible and sophisticated enough to adapt to our needs in years to come."

Ray Fletcher
HEAD OF IT, DIMENSIONS

Roll out

"In essence, we now have a strong platform on which to build in the future and will eventually roll out the CallPort VoIP service to all end users. These days, the roll-out is so straightforward that end users are not even aware of the change from one system to another, except for the fact that they have a different phone on their desks."

"The fact that the service is managed for us is a massive financial advantage. Of course, we could have rolled out our own service, but as a small IT department, the cost of ensuring that we have staff trained and are able to maintain the system would have been prohibitively expensive compared to using a specialist supplier. Also, having the service managed remotely frees up the IT team to focus on other tasks, such as managing applications and responding to users – we are the front end, we leave the background stuff to 8el."



Cost effective

"Furthermore, all local and national calls to fixed lines are free, as part of the package, so there are instant cost savings, plus it makes it a lot easier to predict call costs. Calls to mobiles also cost less than through other services. The move to VoIP has provided savings of over 30%, which will rise to 40% on completion of the roll out."

We have also found that the call quality is very good – it does not suffer in comparison with traditional phone lines, even across a standard DSL line. The key to ensure quality of service is to manage the bandwidth, ensuring that it matches the number of users and likely voice traffic."

Fully managed

"We also like the fact that although the service is managed remotely by 8el, we can control its configuration ourselves, very easily, via a web interface. For instance, we can create call hunt groups, so if a phone isn't answered in one office within a certain number of rings, it automatically diverts to a colleague in another location. Because the service is based on IP Centrex, calls can be easily rerouted, so it also gives us a disaster recovery plan, should one particular site not be accessible."

Looking ahead, another benefit of the service is the fact that it is easy to add more services, quite advanced ones in some cases, such as video conferencing. 8el has also provided us with an Operator Console, which can give us all the functionality of a PBX switchboard, but as a web interface."

Single supplier

"Another benefit is that we can have a single supplier for all our voice and data services. This is important because as IT and communications continue to consolidate, we want to move towards a more multimedia environment – in other words, not just having voice and data services in a single platform, but integration across them."

If we had multiple providers of those services, then it would be difficult to isolate any problems and work out who was responsible. With 8el, because it manages our services for us, we can contact the Network Operations Centre (NOC) during working hours if we have any queries, and the service is automatically and remotely monitored by 8el anyway. If there are any issues, we find that 8el will usually notify us even before we are aware of them."

This is what matters to Dimensions: while cost savings are important, it is essential to us that any systems we use – and that includes telephone services – must not be a barrier to communicating with the people we support. With the new VoIP service in place, we have the same level of functionality regardless of the size of site and a phone service that is flexible and sophisticated enough to adapt to our needs in years to come."