HONOLULU BOARD OF WATER SUPPLY

Honolulu Board of Water Supply Improves Communications, Customer Service with Solution from Cisco Partner Envision Networked Solutions

Cisco Silver Certified Partner Envision Networked Solutions recently helped the Honolulu Board of Water Supply replace its PBX phone system with a Cisco IP Communications solution that saves money while improving customer service and employee productivity.

The Board of Water Supply, located on Oahu, Hawaii, manages the island's municipal water resources and distribution system, providing businesses and residents with safe and dependable water service.

"Our existing legacy phone system didn't have a lot of functionality, was hard to manage, and moves, adds and changes were very difficult," says Brian McKee, CIO for the Honolulu Board of Water Supply. "Within our central complex we had four-digit dialing through the city's PBX system, and then throughout our five service yards we had a combination of four-digit dialing and direct dialing. We wanted to streamline and unify communications for the whole organization, and also upgrade the functionality of our call center so that we could develop best practices for customer service."

IP Communications Expertise Wins Partner the Business

The Board of Water Supply had already worked with Honolulu-based Cisco partner Envision Networked Solutions, and appreciated the positive results from past projects.

"We work well with the Cisco Account Managers in our territory and they regard us as one of their go-to partner for IP communications solutions here because of our expertise and experience," says Rick Phillips, director of sales for Envision Networked Solutions. "The City of Honolulu had standardized on Cisco hardware and Envision had an existing contract as the vendor to provide Cisco equipment, so that along with our IP communications expertise, made us a natural fit for this new project for the water board."

The Honolulu Board of Water Supply had already decided to implement an IP communications solution and Envision was one of the few consultants in the local area that had successfully implemented IP solutions.

The Envision Networked Solution team got to work, focusing on the Honolulu Board of Water Supply's two main goals: improving internal communications and improving its customer service and call center activities.

"We have more than 200 pump stations where potential outages can occur," says McKee. "We wanted to be able to let customers know about interruptions in service and provide updated information, especially after hours. We also wanted to be able to record and monitor calls and easily customize outgoing broadcast-type messages."

According to McKee, such customization was very difficult on the existing call center system provided by another reseller. His group also wanted Envision to develop customized call center reports and graphs and provide a way to display information such as wait times for customer service calls.

Envision recommended Cisco Call Manager, Cisco IPCC (IP Contact Center) Express with 30 agents, and Cisco Unity with Unified Messaging for 1,000 users. To provide updated information for customer service agents, Envision recommended an Inova PC Wallboard integrated with Cisco IPCC.

Thorough Planning Leads to Successful Deployment

In addition to recommending and implementing the IP communications solution, Envision Networked Solutions also handled the training, coordinated with the water board's local telco, and built customized scripting and reporting for IPCC Express. They were able to plan the whole project for deployment over a three-to-four month period. This included lead time with things such as developing new employee phone books, devising a new phone number scheme, and coordinating with the many city agencies that have direct lines into the Honolulu Board of Water Supply. The water board also asked for Envision's expertise to help them develop best practices for their customer service efforts. In order to minimize risks, Envision kept the existing PBX system operating in parallel while the IP communications solution was put in place. When the new solution was tested thoroughly, Envision cut over from the PBX to the IP system over a weekend. The end-users had already received training from Envision on the new phones, so there were no major problems with people using the new system and its features.

"One of the things that tells me this was a successful deployment is that I didn't hear much about it after we cut over to the new system," says McKee. "I knew how hard Envision and my team worked on it so I was expecting some kind of fanfare when we brought the new system up. But it was so seamless, the users just considered it another phone on their desk. There was no disruption of business and everyone was able to start using the new features right away."

New features such as retrieving voicemail messages from Outlook, directory lookup and teleconferencing have enabled some real productivity gains for employees at the Board of Water Supply. In addition, the added functionality of the call center helps the water company provide top-tier customer service, alerting customers of possible outages in service and providing up-to-the-minute information on repairs.

"Best of all, we can manage the call center internally, and when we need new capabilities we'll be able to set those up ourselves. Having one infrastructure for both voice and data on a standards-based system will really enhance our abilities to implement future applications, such as being able to pop up customer information based on a phone number," says McKee. "We can easily make modifications to the call center system, tailoring it to ideally respond to our customer service needs. And the management likes the reports and metrics we can provide."

The team at Envision Networked Solutions has noticed growing interest in the past year of businesses and organizations looking to upgrade their infrastructure.

"IP communications is not really considered 'bleeding edge' anymore," says McKee. "The customer is more knowledgeable about IP and what they want to get out of their network. We'll continue to grow our relationship with Cisco, learn about the IP space and embrace new technologies. The future for IP communications looks very bright."

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