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Unified Voice & Email

CuDerm Moves To Hosted Service From Cypress Communications



When Dallas, Texas,-based CuDerm relocated its offices last year, the company, which sells skin testing products and marketing services to hospitals and cosmetics firms, also left behind an open-source, in-house phone system in favor of a move to a hosted VoIP and unified communications managed service provided by Cypress Communications. The decision to go from an owned (and open-source) implementation to a completely outsourced solution was one that CuDerm made after evaluating several other providers and the pros and cons of going with a managed service.

■ The Difficulties Of Phone Ownership

The main motivation for CuDerm's decision to switch telephony platforms was a planned office relocation in August 2009, which presented an opportunity to make a major change in other systems, says CuDerm Vice President John DeRudder. However, it was the constant problems with the company's existing system—a widely used open-source IP telephony platform—and the amount of time the IT staff was investing in trying to make open source work for them, that had also motivated him to make the switch.

"We're a relatively small company, and there's a million and one things that the IT staff could be doing. The last thing they needed on their plate is a phone system with problems," says DeRudder.

One problem with the existing system was occasional noise on the line. Another was that the long-distance service would occasionally cut out, sometimes right before an important conference call.

"We would walk into a conference room and couldn't get a most basic component, a phone, to work," says DeRudder. "When we had clients there, it made us look pretty bad, frankly."

Although CuDerm had hired an outside contractor to set up the system and a consultant to help troubleshoot the long distance and noise issues, performance continued to be a problem. Also, the system lacked the ability to assign employees their own direct dial numbers, meaning that customers had to always go through the main number to reach an extension. Another concern was the lack of a good user interface.

"Getting the phones to ring in the right area was complicated. There wasn't a good workflow for laying out a dial plan," says DeRudder, noting that the concept of open source was appealing, but CuDerm just didn't have the IT staff to make it work.

■ Go Hosted

When CuDerm opted to change phone systems, it started by conducting a Web search and talking to other companies in March 2009. Although it had no experience with a hosted solution, it considered both purchased and hosted options.

"Cypress came up as a contender, and it was clear they were a large enough company that we would do business with them," says DeRudder.

The Cypress Communications C4 IP hosted unified communications platform (www.cypresscom.net) was what CuDerm eventually opted for after looking at five other products, including an open-source VoIP platform that was supported by a major computer company and, DeRudder says, also was a strong product. The main factors in Cypress' favor were price and ongoing maintenance.

On-premises systems were familiar territory for CuDerm's IT staff. Despite the time and trouble sometimes involved in maintaining an in-house system, CuDerm staff generally knew what to expect in terms of cost and maintenance. However, because of the troubles they'd experienced with the prior phone system, CuDerm's management wasn't so sure it wanted to go through another in-house telephony project on its own.

As DeRudder explains, if CuDerm invested in its own system, it would have to pay for the implementation and configuration services to set it up, but it would still have to handle all of the routine maintenance, end-user assistance, and other troubleshooting itself. "We would have had someone who could do part of it for us, but we'd still deal with the maintenance," DeRudder says.

The combination of the up-front capital costs, the implementation and integration services CuDerm would have to hire, and the likelihood of having to expend a lot of IT time on continued maintenance and management of the system made a hosted solution seem much more appealing. In the case of the Cypress Communications C4 IP, the package was especially attractive, says DeRudder, as it included not only the software platform and services but also all of the equipment and maintenance on the equipment.

The other issue was cost. Although CuDerm did not have to shoulder a capital investment up front, it did have to consider how much it could afford on a monthly ongoing basis.

"For example, if we want to put one phone in the kitchen, and a second in a conference room, and others here and there, they all have to be paid for even if they aren't all being used constantly. So we had to consider the monthly cost of those phones," explains DeRudder, adding that, on the other hand, to purchase a system meant investing at least \$10,000 in equipment up front.

DeRudder notes that another consideration in Cypress' favor was the probability that any on-premises purchased telephony product could wind up costing the company more than expected if problems appeared that required additional consulting or hardware purchases.

Another factor was the 24/7 on-call service that CuDerm could get from a hosted provider included as part of the monthly fee. "We liked the fact that we could call if we had problems, even for something small like how to set up a conference call," he says. "We had some peace of mind going with Cypress."

■ Up & Running

The Cypress product implementation took about two months, and it was up and running on Sept. 1 when CuDerm moved into its new offices.

Two key features that CuDerm is using on a regular basis are call routing, which lets employees create custom call routes so a call can follow the person to whichever extension they're at, and a feature called "hunt group," which follows a process of routing a call first to one person then another in a department until someone can take the call. In addition, audio conference is a well-used function and can be set up as three-, six-, or 30-way conferencing.

CuDerm also likes the softphones that let users make calls from their laptops, and unified messaging, which makes .WAV files out of voice messages and attaches them to email. People can check both their email and their voicemail from the same place, without having to dial into their phones.

"The unified messaging is important because it lets us listen to voicemail as email

attachments from any computer,” says DeRudder. “Our salespeople like the call routing, because they can route calls to whatever location they’re at. Even though we liked the idea of open source, this hosted solution has been a good decision for us. We have someone to call if something goes wrong, which is one of those intangibles that is hard to put a price on.” ■

by Sue Hildreth

Cypress Communications C4 IP

A hosted VoIP and unified communications solution with redundant network and dynamic bandwidth for consistent call quality and high-speed data transfer; features include desktop chat, unified messaging, automatic call distribution, and presence information.

“Even though we liked the idea of open source, this hosted solution has been a good decision for us. We have someone to call if something goes wrong, which is one of those intangibles that is hard to put a price on,” says CuDerm Vice President John DeRudder.

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