

KNOX COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY MOVES CISCO OUT, SHORETEL IN

ShoreTel VoIP Replaces Unreliable, Costly Cisco System



Challenge:

The Knox County Housing Authority had a leased Cisco Voice over IP (VoIP) phone system that was, according to the organization, unreliable, inflexible, and costly to maintain. The Cisco system also lacked monitoring and analysis features the organization needed to continually improve its internal communications and operations.

Solution:

ShoreTel provided the organization with a comprehensive solution including ShoreGear voice switches and ShorePhone IP telephones.

Benefits:

- With ShoreTel replacing Cisco, the housing authority is now saving over \$20,000 a year.
- The reliability and voice quality of the ShoreTel system ensures no urgent calls into the organization are missed or unclear.
- With the intuitiveness of a ShoreTel system, employees spend more time on critical job-related tasks rather than navigating a complicated telephone system. ShoreTel's rich features further boost productivity.

The Knox County Housing Authority in Knoxville, Tennessee administers public housing and HUD voucher assistance programs for its citizens. The organization also manages two public housing apartment complexes for low-income families. In 2004, the organization had a Cisco Voice over IP (VoIP) phone system. However, the system was unreliable, once even prohibiting a call to 911, which was one of the last errors the housing authority would tolerate. (Thankfully, the housing authority had a backup Telecommunications Device for the Deaf, a TDD, which it was able to use for the 911 emergency.)

The Cisco telephone system was also not as flexible as the organization wanted it to be, especially when it came to making last minute changes to greetings or users. The Cisco system also lacked monitoring and analysis features the organization needed to continually improve its internal communications and operations. Finally, the system was expensive to manage and the governmental organization needed to find ways to cut some of its communications costs.

The Knox County Housing Authority called on its integration partner for insight, expertise and advice. Their partner recommended a new ShoreTel VoIP system for the organization. In order to maintain balance in its search for a new system, the housing authority also spoke with representatives from the Cisco reseller about updating the Cisco solution to meet their needs.

After carefully considering the associated costs and implementation steps, as well as the future management capabilities of an upgraded Cisco system versus a new ShoreTel system, the Knox County Housing Authority chose ShoreTel, citing the solution's cost-effectiveness, reliability, excellent and consistent voice quality, and robust feature set as top reasons for its choice.

SHORETEL PROVIDES RELIABILITY AND EXCELLENT VOICE QUALITY

ShoreTel provided the Knox County Housing Authority with a comprehensive solution to replace the old Cisco system, including a ShoreGear-60/12 voice switch and ShoreTel ShorePhone IP telephones. ShoreTel's ShoreWare Director is used to manage the solution.

In terms of reliability, the housing authority's telephone system must always work properly, due to the nature of apartment complex management. "Our phone system must be up 24/7 for maintenance calls



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Knox County Housing Authority

from tenants in the apartments,” said John Pollock, Assistant Director with the Knox County Housing Authority. “The new ShoreTel system is very reliable. Voice quality is also excellent, unlike the Cisco phone system which sounded like a bad cell phone connection every now and then. We also needed to reboot the old Cisco system often—it seemed more prone to going down during storms and power surges.”

COSTS REDUCED, MANAGEMENT SIMPLIFIED

The new ShoreTel system cost less than an upgrade would have cost for the housing authority’s leased Cisco system. “Upgrading the Cisco system would have been expensive and it wouldn’t even belong to us—it was leased,” said Pollock. “For less than that price, we could buy the entire ShoreTel system, which was also more cost-effective in the long run. With ShoreTel, we’re looking at savings of \$20,000 per year in lease expenses, usage fees, and T1 line charges. We no longer need all of the lines, including two T1 lines, that we used to need. We were able to replace them with more cost-effective high-capacity DSL lines.”

In addition to cost savings, the organization has simplified its management tasks with ShoreWare Director, ShoreTel’s browser-based management interface. ShoreWare Director allows the housing authority’s information systems personnel to access the system from anywhere on the network and manage every site and feature, including voice mail, automated attendant and desktop applications. When a new user is added, an administrator simply clicks “add new” and enters the user’s name, which in turn automatically updates the centralized database and voice switches, creates a new voice mailbox for the user, and updates the automated attendant dial-by-name and number feature and online directories—all within seconds.

“With ShoreTel, we now do maintenance in-house, which saves us time and money,” said Pollock. “With the Cisco solution, if we had a problem, we had to leave a voice mail with a request for help and then wait for them. We’re far more productive now that we can do maintenance ourselves. Also, with ShoreWare Director we can look at call volume per line, change messages and on-hold options, and more. Reviewing this information regularly allows us to make the best use of all our lines and quickly see where we need to make changes.”

ALL CALLS ANSWERED

ShoreTel’s ShoreWare Auto-Attendant provides the housing authority with 24-hour automated call answering and routing capabilities. Outgoing prompts can be customized and linked to the time of day and/or day of week, and individual groups can also have their own menus with unique greetings and options. Finally, ShoreTel’s powerful Follow Me Find Me feature allows employees to configure the system so that callers can find them wherever they are working—for instance, on their cell phone or an alternate phone. If the person does not answer any of their phones, the call only then reverts to the ShoreTel voice mail system.



EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY BOOSTED

ShoreTel phone systems are easy to use, simple to manage, flexible, and reliable. ShoreWare Personal Call Manager is integrated tightly with Knox County Housing Authority employees' Microsoft Outlook so they enjoy unified messaging, such as directory dialing, contact screen pop, and calendar integration. Users can quickly type in a name, which automatically brings up the contact's number, and make calls from local online directories—all with the click of a mouse, right from the desktop. With ShoreTel's e-mail integration, e-mail and voice mail can be managed centrally right from employees' desktops, and voice mail messages can even be attached to e-mail messages for forwarding. With the intuitive ShoreTel solution, employees spend less time navigating a complicated telephone system and more time performing job-related tasks.

"Since we replaced the Cisco phone system with ShoreTel, we are definitely noticing improved communications—both internal and external," said Pollock. "Calls from outside are routed quickly to the right person, and we can review things like call volume and voice mail logs, which is powerful information when it comes to continually making customer service improvements."

READY FOR GROWTH

The Knox County Housing Authority is happy with its decision to go with a new ShoreTel VoIP system. "Our employees like all the features of the system that make their lives easier, and I appreciate the fact that we can manage it in-house and don't have to depend on anyone else," said Pollock. "We're looking at adding some new departments and expanding our network and the ShoreTel system. We're happy to have ShoreTel on our side as we grow and continually make improvements to our communications system."

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