

VISITING NURSE ASSOCIATION OF BOSTON SWITCHES TO VOIP AND ENJOYS COST SAVINGS AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

ShoreTel VoIP Improves Employee Productivity, Enhances Patient Service, Eases System Management



Challenge:

The Visiting Nurse Association was faced with an unreliable, inflexible, and poorly performing telephone system. The previous system also required a service provider to manage it and perform moves, adds and changes, which was costly and inefficient.

Solution:

ShoreTel provided VNA of Boston with an end-to-end solution, including ShoreGear voice switches and ShorePhone IP telephones across the organization's four Massachusetts locations.

Benefits:

- ShoreTel integration with patient information database dramatically enhances customer service for patients calling into the VNA.
- The ability to manage the system in-house saves money, resources, and time.
- Robust features of the ShoreTel system enhance employee productivity.

The Visiting Nurse Association of Boston is a non-profit, community-based, home health care agency, committed to providing residents of Greater Boston and surrounding communities with care that will maximize their health, independence and quality of life. One of the largest visiting nurse associations in the northeast, providing nursing, rehabilitation and home health aide services to nearly 15,000 patients each year, the Visiting Nurse Association of Boston is dedicated to providing quality home health care to patients regardless of illness, income or insurance.

In early 2005, the Association was using a Verizon Centrex telephone system, which proved to be unreliable, inflexible and delivered poor quality. In addition, the previous system could not be managed in-house by VNA of Boston administrators, which meant whenever changes had to be made or new employees joined, it required direct involvement by Verizon to handle the administrative tasks. Finally, the Verizon contract had been negotiated for 1,000 very expensive voice mail boxes, so if the Association was not using them to capacity, money was inevitably wasted.

Because of the performance and reliability issues, along with the rigidity of the Verizon contract, the VNA of Boston decided to look at other solutions in order to improve their telephone system service. In January of 2005, the VNA of Boston sent out a request for proposal (RFP) to both PBX-based system vendors as well as Voice over IP (VoIP) solution vendors.

“The RFP we issued allowed traditional, as well as VoIP, vendors to recommend what they believed would be the best solution for our operations,” said Fran Lorion, CIO for the Visiting Nurses Association of Boston. “We simply needed a high-quality system that was reliable, because of the critical nature of our business, and one that was cost-effective and easy to manage.”

The VNA of Boston considered solutions from Avaya, Cisco, Interactive Intelligence, Mitel, Nortel and ShoreTel, checking references, performing site visits, and seeing product demonstrations. Each company was represented by a technology integrator, and these firms were helpful in laying out the benefits of each. The Association had created an internal task force to make the decision, and each member was asked to list the vendors in order of preference in terms of meeting the agency's needs. The



“The integration of ShoreTel with our patient database allows us to quickly determine who is calling and whether it is a patient, clinician or staff member. With ShoreTel, information is automatically delivered to the screen along with all of the diagnoses and personnel associated with the patient [calling]. It translates to improved customer service as well as cost savings due to the time it saves receptionists.”

– Fran Lorion

CIO

*Visiting Nurses Association
of Boston*

final two vendors chosen were Avaya and ShoreTel. The final consideration included ease of use, flexibility, and the ability to manage from in-house and this made the decision easy: The VNA of Boston chose ShoreTel.

THE SWITCH SAVES MONEY

ShoreTel provided the Visiting Nurse Association with a total of 14 ShoreGear voice switches across its four district office locations in Massachusetts, including: six ShoreGear-T1, six ShoreGear-120/24, two ShoreGear-60/12 voice switches, and one ShoreGear-40/8 voice switch. In addition, the Association has deployed 264 ShorePhone IP Phones, including 155 ShorePhone IP 210 phones, 105 ShorePhone IP 530 phones and 4 ShorePhone IP 560 phones. The Association has three voice mail servers and 525 voice mailboxes with the ShoreTel system, which is sufficient for present staff members and is flexible enough to grow.

The ShoreTel system took a mere two months to deploy across all four VNA of Boston locations. In addition to the ease of implementation, the ShoreTel system is simple and cost-effective to maintain. “With ShoreTel, our maintenance costs will go down substantially because we can do it ourselves in-house,” said Lorion. “Also, because we don’t have to wait for a service provider to come out, we can also do things more quickly as changes are needed. We’re not at the mercy of the service provider’s schedule. When we need to make changes, they must happen quickly. We have more control over that now.”

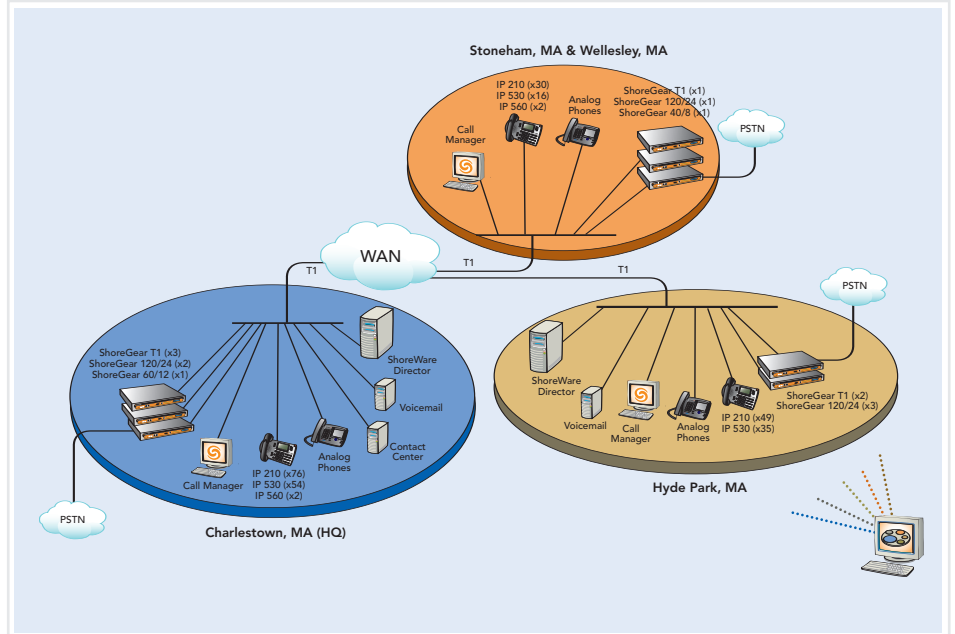
IMPROVED PATIENT CARE

The VNA of Boston has specially integrated the ShoreTel system with its in-house SQL patient information database through a small custom application by Traxi, which allows receptionists and operators to immediately get a great deal of information on whomever is calling in and link calls to the database for a running history. In the past, receptionists could not determine which incoming calls were from patients or staff or other outside parties. With ShoreTel, patients are identified even before the phone call is answered and a window “pops” on the screen providing all of the important information necessary to handle the patient’s particular needs. This process used to take as long as 5-10 minutes to handle. The system also identifies if a nurse is calling in using a patient’s phone, helping determine where the nurse is and improving employee security. The time to obtain these critical details has been reduced from minutes to seconds.

“The integration of ShoreTel with our patient database allows us to quickly determine who is calling and whether it is a patient, clinician or staff member,” said Lorion. “We automatically get the correct spelling of the caller’s name, along with other important information, and maximize the time on the phone with each caller without having to continually ask redundant questions. With ShoreTel, information is automatically delivered to the screen along with all of the diagnoses and personnel associated with the caller if they are a patient. It translates to improved patient satisfaction as well as cost savings due to the time it saves receptionists.”



In addition, ShoreTel's ShoreWare Auto-Attendant provides 24-hour automated call answering and routing for VNA to improve customer service for inbound callers, whether they be patients or physicians. Outgoing prompts can be customized and linked to the time of day and/or day of week. Individual groups can also have their own menus with unique greetings and options.



Visiting Nurses Association of Boston deployed 264 ShorePhone IP phones to four locations.

SIMPLIFIED MANAGEMENT

ShoreTel's ShoreWare Director is a browser-based management interface that provides the Association with easy access to the system from anywhere on the network. Through ShoreWare Director, an administrator can manage every site, including voice mail, automated attendant and desktop applications. Adding a new user is simply a matter of clicking a button and entering the user's name, which automatically updates the centralized database and every ShoreTel voice switch, creates a mailbox for the user, and updates the automated attendant dial-by-name and number feature and online directories. The entire process takes just a few seconds.

"Our core competence is providing care, not managing a telephone system," said Lorion. "We needed a system we could manage easily and would be simple to use by our employees. The demonstration of the ShoreTel system clearly indicated how easy the entire system was to set up and use and how easy it would be to add phones. Ease of use and management was one of the factors that drove us to choose ShoreTel."

ENHANCED PRODUCTIVITY

The ShoreTel system provides VNA employees with powerful dialing and call/message management features. With ShoreWare Personal Call Manager integrated with Outlook, employees can quickly type in a name, bring up a number, and make calls from local online directories—all with the click of a

"With ShoreTel, our maintenance costs will go down substantially because we can do it ourselves in-house [and because] we don't have to wait for a service provider to come out, we can also do things more quickly"

– Fran Lorion
CIO

Visiting Nurses Association
of Boston



“Our core competence is providing care, not managing a telephone system. Ease of use and management was one of the factors that drove us to choose ShoreTel.”

– Fran Lorion
CIO

Visiting Nurses Association
of Boston

mouse, right from the desktop. With ShoreTel’s e-mail integration, employees can also manage their e-mail and voice mail activity centrally and efficiently right from their desktop.

Voice mail messages are stored in the industry-standard WAV Audio for Windows format, so users can attach them to email messages or embed them in other documents. The ability of the ShoreTel system to track phone calls, export and distribute original voice mail messages to one person or a group of people, and keep a running history of calls into each number is helpful in continually monitoring and improving customer service.

“Employees like the fact that voice mail shows up in their email box,” said Lorion. “Access to missed calls also improves productivity because employees can go into Call Manager, look up the history of calls that have come in and simply click a button to call the person back. It saves time and trouble.”

FORMALIZED CALL CENTER

ShoreTel’s Contact Center provides VNA of Boston with a formalized call center by including advanced real-time management and historical measurement tools. Contact Center enables VNA supervisors to ensure agents are delivering consistent service and provides a comprehensive view of how calls are being handled by each agent. Performance and statistical information lets VNA of Boston know how the center is performing and what needs to be done for further improvement.

“Our call center is separate from the receptionists and callers dial a special number to reach it,” said Lorion. “We’re using ShoreTel’s Contact Center as a number through which referrals come from hospitals, clinics, and other physicians. The agents have gotten very comfortable with Contact Center so far and as their comfort grows, we anticipate it will become a very powerful tool for both agents and supervisors.”

MOVING FORWARD

The Visiting Nurse Association of Boston is looking forward to capitalizing on all of the features of the ShoreTel system. “Our Central Intake Department is more effective using Contact Center and we expect more improvements as well,” said Lorion. “As more people learn everything that Call Manager can do, I expect to hear a lot more positive comments. We’ve only tapped the surface of what the ShoreTel system can do because it’s fairly new. The SQL database integration has received a lot of recognition because it is very visible at the front desk. We are glad we took the leap into VoIP with ShoreTel and look forward to more improvements the system will help our organization make.”