

NET's VX Series Unified Communications Gateway Helps Global Manufacturer Albany International Centralize Operations, Boost Employee Productivity, and Slash Telecom Costs

Integration with Microsoft OCS and Multiple Legacy PBXs Ensures Successful Migration to Highly Efficient Unified Communications Environment

Ask Barry Duncan, Vice President, IT for Albany International Corp., about VoIP and he will make his perspective abundantly clear. VoIP is more than just a way to cut telecom costs. It's an ingredient in a larger recipe for business success.

"If you look at VoIP in isolation, you may save a little money – but you won't have a real impact on the business that way," he explains. "But if you're leveraging VoIP as part of a broader unified communications strategy, you can substantially impact your company's performance."

That's exactly what Duncan has done with NET's help. Using NET's VX Series Unified Communications Gateway together with Microsoft OCS, Duncan's team is enabling Albany International – a global leader for advanced textiles and material processing – to consolidate and centralize shared corporate services, boost staff productivity, and drive down telecom costs.

Albany International is achieving these objectives in a disciplined, staged manner that is neither overwhelming the company's IT resources, nor disrupting business.

Unified Communications in a strategic business context

Albany International is the world's leading producer of custom-designed fabrics and belts essential to the production of paper and paperboard. Albany's family of emerging businesses extends its advanced textiles and materials capabilities into a variety of other industries, most notably aerospace composites, nonwovens, building products, and high-performance industrial doors.

In order to maintain its competitive position in today's challenging global marketplace, Albany International has been shifting to a shared services model. So rather than having business operations such as procurement, finance, and customer care distributed across its various international locations, the company is consolidating and centralizing them. One consequence, though, has been an increase in the call volume between the various locations, adding to telecom costs.

Duncan's team recognized that switching to VoIP to bypass the PSTN for much of its international calling would provide increased call capacity while simultaneously decreasing telecom costs. Albany's existing MPLS-based global data network would be a key enabler of Albany's strategy while reducing costs – a win-win. Down the road, the solution would need to provide a path to decommissioning the installed PBXs, which carry significant ongoing costs.

Optimizing the productivity of the company's shared services staff was crucial to the strategy's success. Microsoft's Office Communications Server was the answer. With OCS, Albany would be able to take advantage of features such as rich presence, the ability to choose the optimal communication method, and Exchange-based voicemail to reduce phone tag. VoIP combined with Microsoft OCS would thus be pivotal to Albany's productivity strategy.

Of course, using the MPLS network to carry voice traffic would also allow Albany to bypass the PSTN for much of its international calling. And, over the long term, the right VoIP solution (in conjunction with Microsoft OCS) would let the company retire its diverse, aging PBX infrastructure – which carried with it significant ongoing costs.

"There were several compelling reasons to migrate to a converged environment," says Duncan. "The only question was how to best accomplish that migration, given the specific attributes of our existing enterprise telecom infrastructure."

Choosing the right VoIP solution

Once Duncan and his team made a decision to move ahead with their convergence plans, they undertook an exhaustive search and evaluation of available VoIP gateway solutions. The solution needed to execute on all their convergence plans: a shift to VoIP, increased connectivity and productivity, reduced costs including PBX decommissioning and the flexibility to support their

company re-alignment now and in the future. "Understanding your global telecommunications environment and associated intricacies is crucial during this process," said Tom Rice, Communications Architect with Albany International.

A primary issue in Albany's criteria was the legacy Avaya, Alcatel, Siemens, and other sundry PBXs installed across its 31 world-wide locations. The perfect gateway would be able to interoperate seamlessly with all of the installed PBXs. In the long-term, the plan was to eventually retire its PBXs, so the solution also needed to encompass a next-generation infrastructure engineered with Microsoft OCS as the telephony core.

That naturally meant that any voice gateway that Albany implemented must integrate well with OCS. In fact, it would have to provide integration with all the Microsoft components of Albany's enterprise environment – including OCS, Exchange, and Active Directory (AD). Rice states, "The ability to perform intelligent routing with Enterprise Directory-based Dialing will not only provide flexibility but will simplify and consolidate management."

Many other evaluation criteria were considered. Among these were security, ease of management, and call processing capabilities.

In addition to assessing the VoIP hardware solutions, Duncan and his team carefully considered the companies behind them. In particular, Duncan wanted to be sure that any VoIP hardware vendor he chose would be able to provide the support and expertise the company needed to deal with any technical challenges they might encounter during their extended migration plan. This was especially important in light of both the scope of Albany's convergence initiative and the demands already being placed on Albany's technical staff.

Duncan also needed to have confidence in the vendor's long-term technology roadmap.

"When you're looking several years out in your IT strategy, you have to have a strong sense that your partners are going to be able to respond to unforeseen changes in technology and in the market," Duncan notes. "If Microsoft changes direction at some point while we're in the process of moving to a converged communications environment, we're going to need our VoIP hardware partner to be able to change direction accordingly, too."

NET: The right partner with the right solution

After completing the initial stages of their evaluation, Duncan and his team created a "short list" of VoIP vendors whose solutions they would test. In this stage of the evaluation, units were placed in production in the company's headquarters at Albany, New York in their data center at Lithia Springs, Georgia and in a manufacturing facility located in Kaukauna, Wisconsin. This configuration allowed Duncan and his team to determine if each vendor's VoIP solution performed as promised.

NET's VX Unified Communications Gateway made the cut. It fulfilled all of the company's key criteria – including broad PBX support, robust call processing, strong security features, management functionality, and Microsoft Unified Communications Certification. "Integration with Active Directory is particularly important, since it will allow call routing to be driven by what's going on in AD," explains Duncan. "So, for example, AD integration helps in easily migrating users to OCS from legacy PBXs. In addition, a fax can be automatically stored in user's mailbox in Microsoft Exchange, and more advanced routing decisions can be programmed by just entering routing numbers in AD."

While the primary purpose of the test was to validate each vendor's claims about its VoIP hardware, it also wound up revealing which vendor was best able to deliver the kind of expertise and support Albany would likely require in the coming months and years.

NET and Intrinsic Technologies excelled in this regard. They brought highly skilled engineers on-site, unlike other vendors who merely provided telephone access to their technical staff. NET engineers were not just experts in their own gateways' technologies, they were also knowledgeable about the various PBXs that Albany had in place, as well as the Microsoft UC and Unified Messaging solutions.

By the time the testing was complete, it was clear that NET and Intrinsic Technologies were the right choice. Only the VX Series Unified Communications Gateway provided the interoperability and call management functionality Albany required for key functions, such as the ability to place 7-digit phone calls between any pair of endpoints, to include voicemails in Exchange mailboxes, to gain presence awareness with IP phones, and to administer VoIP hardware in a common manner with OCS servers.

"When you're embarking on a project that is this complex and that can potentially have such a big impact on your company, you want to have the utmost confidence in both the technology you're using and the company behind that technology," declares Duncan. "With NET and the VX Series gateway, we have that confidence."

Fulfilling the near- and long-term requirements of the business

Having made the decision to go with VX Series Unified Communications Gateway, Duncan and his team were able to move forward with their long-range plan for Albany. Rather than doing a costly and disruptive overhaul of the company's entire global telecommunications infrastructure, Albany installed VX Series gateways at a few carefully selected locations at a time. In some cases, these locations were selected because the PBX was nearing the end of its useful life – and therefore a good candidate for eventual replacement with the combination of a VX Series gateway and Microsoft OCS. In others, it was because the location's users were particularly good candidates for using VoIP and OCS to achieve productivity gains. In still others, it was because the high volume of voice traffic made the cost savings from VoIP very attractive.

Users in these locations are already raving about the benefits of having their voicemail routed to their Exchange mailboxes and being able to detect the presence of their colleagues down the hall or in another country. "If you know someone isn't at their desk, you can just send them an email instead of trying to call them first," says Duncan. "Apparently minor advantages like that really add up when you're communicating with people day in and day out."

Duncan adds that his confidence in NET has only grown since the initial production test. "When a market is still developing – as is the case with convergence – it's important to see your vendors adapting to the lessons that companies are learning as they go," he says. "In the case of NET, we've already seen them add and modify features based on our input and that of their other customers."

Duncan also advises other IT executives planning similar convergence implementations to be very deliberate about choosing a VoIP hardware partner – and to not fall into the trap of thinking that the biggest vendors are the safest vendors. "One thing we realized along the way is that the dominant companies in this space are not always the best at integrating with other vendor's equipment – because their real intent is to get you locked into their own end-to-end solution," Duncan observes. "NET's approach, which is to co-exist with a full range of third-party technologies, makes much more sense in terms of immediate deployment and future adaptability to potentially unforeseen technical requirements."

For more information about NET and its solutions please visit www.net.com
For more information on Intrinsic and their Technology offerings visit www.intrinsic.net

Intrinsic[®]

Corporate Headquarters
1011 Warrenville Road, Suite 155
Lisle, IL 60532
T: 630.769.4111
F: 630.241.9071
Toll free: 888.737.8110
E inquiry@intrinsic.net

Microsoft[®]
GOLD CERTIFIED
Partner

Advanced Infrastructure
Data Management
Information Worker Solutions
Mobility Solutions
Networking Infrastructure
Security
Service-Oriented Architecture & Business Process
Unified Communications

net[™]
Network Equipment Technologies

Corporate Headquarters
6900 Paseo Padre Parkway
Fremont, CA 94555 U.S.A.
T 510.713.7300
F 510.574.4000
E info@net.com

N.E.T. Federal
21660 Ridgeway Circle,
Suite 100Dulles, VA 20166, U.S.A
T 703.948.1800
F 703.948.1850
E net_federal@net.com

Microsoft[®]
GOLD CERTIFIED
Partner

OEM Hardware Solutions
Information Worker Solutions
Networking Infrastructure Solutions

This document does not create any express or implied warranty by NET about its products or services, or the features thereof, and NET makes no representation regarding the suitability of its products for any particular purpose. Specifications and other information herein is subject to change without notice.
© 2009 Network Equipment Technologies, Inc. All rights reserved. VX, Tenor Series, VXbill, VXbuilder, VXgate, VXscript, VXvue, VXwatch, NET, and the NET logo are trademarks of Network Equipment Technologies, Inc., and its subsidiary, N.E.T. Federal, Inc. All other trademarks are the sole property of their respective companies.