



Customer Case Study

Lumber Company Improves Responsiveness to Callers

Mountain Lumber Company streamlined customer and employee communication with a Cisco Unified Communications system.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
MOUNTAIN LUMBER COMPANY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail • Boone, North Carolina, USA • 29 Employees
BUSINESS CHALLENGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve responsiveness to customer calls • Increase employee productivity • Support future growth
NETWORK SOLUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deployed Cisco Unified Communications system at main location • Integrated a nearby location using wireless connectivity • Securely integrated a remote location using a VPN
BUSINESS RESULTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved customer satisfaction by reducing response time for customer inquiries • Increased employee efficiency by reducing missed calls

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Located in the mountains of North Carolina, Mountain Lumber is a local building supplier specializing in the needs of custom home builders. The company has 29 employees in three locations. Most of the company’s customers are building contractors, who appreciate it when a live person answers the phone to schedule deliveries or answer questions about product availability and delivery status. “Our business depends on the phone system,” says Sandra Simmons, owner of Mountain Lumber.

Previously, the company leased a key system and six phone lines for its main location, two phone lines for the location across the street, and another phone line for the remote location, at a cost of more than \$300 monthly. Having separate phone systems and voicemail systems for each location impeded customer service and increased management requirements. If a customer called when no lines were available, the call automatically rolled over to voicemail, which one employee checked periodically throughout the day. “Trying to reach a salesperson at another location was a daily aggravation because if all lines were busy we would be directed to voicemail,” says Simmons. “After a few tries we would often give up and call the individual’s cell phone, which increased costs.”

In addition, employees could not transfer calls to other locations, which had their own phone numbers. The overhead paging system served only the main office. Therefore, reaching someone in another location meant tying up a phone line at both locations.

“We wanted a single voice system that would unify the three offices and make it easier for customers and employees to reach each other,” Simmons says.

NETWORK SOLUTION

Mountain Lumber learned of the Cisco Unified Communications system through word of mouth—“which is how we hear about things in the mountains of North Carolina,” according to Simmons. Another business owner recommended a network integration company, AT-NET Services, Inc. of Charlotte, North Carolina, to plan and install the system. AT-NET is a Cisco Premier Certified Partner with specializations in IP Telephony and Wireless.

“Based on Mountain Lumber’s business needs—reliable phone service, the ability to reach employees in other offices, and integrated paging—we recommended an IP telephony solution based on Cisco Unified CallManager Express and Cisco Unified IP phones, and an integrated voicemail solution based on Cisco Unity Express,” says Joel Sosebee, account manager with AT-NET. Other than the Cisco

Unified IP Phones, the only equipment needed for all three offices is one Cisco Integrated Services Router, which provides integrated IP telephony, voicemail, and automated attendant capabilities in a single platform when nobody is available to answer the phones.

Now voice calls and pages travel over the same IP network that Mountain Lumber uses for its business applications. AT-NET connected the location across the street over a wireless network. The remote office shares the same voice system, connecting with a VPN that encrypts the voice traffic for security. The company purchased a wireless Cisco Unified IP Phone 7920 for the yard manager, as well as two more that are shared by employees at the main location and door shop.

AT-NET installed the system in May 2006, without disrupting Mountain Lumber's phone service. It took just a few minutes to train employees how to use the new features, such as transferring calls to employees in other offices, putting calls on hold, and parking calls, which means placing a call on hold at one extension and continuing the conversation from another.

“Now we can respond to customers’ calls more easily because the yard manager has a Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phone 7920, we can transfer calls to any location, and we can page people using the same phones we use for regular calls.”

— Sandra Simmons, Owner, Mountain Lumber Company

Employees overwhelmingly rate Cisco Unity Express Voicemail as their favorite new capability. “Before, only one person checked voicemail, which required dialing a separate phone number and access code,” says Simmons. “Now anyone can retrieve their own voicemail by pressing a soft key on their IP phone.” Mountain Lumber uses the automated attendant feature in Cisco Unity Express Voicemail to automatically send calls to voicemail after business hours. Callers can also use the dial-by-name feature or select the employee extension number from a directory to be transferred directly to that employee.

AT-NET remained on site for one week following the deployment to verify proper operation and customize the system to Mountain Lumber's needs “We made sure that when employees picked up the handset, the built-in display on their IP phones showed the features that employees at this company were most likely to need, such as voicemail, call transferring, and setting up a conference call,” says Sosebee. “People handle change in different ways, so we made sure that all employees realized that the new features would help them be more efficient and would not be difficult to use.”

The Cisco Unified Communications system has eliminated the need for a separate intercom system, as well. Employees can now send a page to any one of the three locations by using their Cisco Unified IP Phones to dial a special number.

BUSINESS RESULTS

Callers receive faster service. “Now we can respond to customers’ calls more easily because the yard manager has a Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phone 7920, we can transfer calls to any location, and we can send a page to any location using the same phones we use for regular calls,” says Simmons. A salesperson can instantly reach the yard manager to find out whether an order was shipped, for example. “The faster we can find out about product availability and shipping status, the better the service we provide to our customer,” says Simmons.

Another benefit of the Cisco Unified Communications system emerged in the summer of 2006, when Mountain Lumber exhibited at a home show eight miles away. When the company received calls for a salesperson who was attending the show, the person who answered the phone could forward calls directly to the salesperson's cell phone so that callers did not have to wait until the individual checked voicemail.

Employees can collaborate more easily. Mountain Lumber can now conduct conference calls with employees in different locations, saving driving time. “The Cisco Unified Communications system is so easy to use that we set up our first conference call without even reading the instruction manual, just by pressing a key on the IP phone,” says Simmons.

PRODUCT LIST
Routing and Switching <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cisco Catalyst Switch 3560• Cisco Catalyst Switch 2950• Cisco 2821 Integrated Services RouterBroadband Cable
Security and VPN <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cisco PIX Firewalls
Voice and IP Communications <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cisco Unified CallManager Express• Cisco Unity Express• Cisco Unified IP Phone 7960
Wireless <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cisco 1231G Wireless Access Points• Cisco Unified IP Phone 7920

The company can move, add, and change telephone extensions at no cost. Previously, Mountain Lumber had to pay the phone company whenever an extension was moved or changed. “Our new Cisco Unified Communications system is very portable,” says Simmons. “You can move a computer or phone to any location in the building and simply plug it in—without paying a service provider.”

Management and support are much simpler now that all three offices share a single voice and voicemail system. “We only need to manage one Cisco device, the Cisco 2821 Integrated Series Router, which reduces management and support costs,” says Sosebee.

NEXT STEPS

In 2006 Mountain Lumber will move its door store to another location and merge it with another business. The Cisco Unified Communications system has the capacity for as many phone lines and additional telephones as the company anticipates ever needing. “Cisco was the best choice for Mountain Lumber because Cisco Unified CallManager Express

does everything the company needs—without requiring a large investment,” says Sosebee.

Simmons concludes, “We are ready for the future because our Cisco Unified Communications system has the features and reliability we need today as well as capacity to add new lines as we grow.”



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