

CASE STUDY: CONSTRUCTION

PCL CONSTRUCTORS WEIGHS THE BENEFITS OF HOSTED PBX AND FINDS CLOUD CONVENIENCE

"We're moving more and more to the cloud... cloud services seem to be the way to go now."

- John Armstrong, Systems Administrator, PCL Constructors



SUMMARY

Region (where solution was implemented):
Edmonton, AB

Industry:
Construction

Locations:
North America, Australia and the Caribbean

Employees:
4,400

Business Challenges:
Find a cost competitive voice solution suitable for multiple Edmonton-based locations

Solution:
Move from on-premise phone systems to 60 seat Hosted PBX with new phones

- Key Results:**
- Hosted PBX proves itself on cost, convenience, performance and reliability
 - Streamlined solution with quick set-up time
 - Low to no maintenance, providing greater productivity
 - Cloud-based solution aligns with mobility requirements of the construction industry

BACKGROUND

The largest contractor organization in Canada, Edmonton-based, employee-owned PCL Constructors offers building, industrial and civil infrastructure services through over 30 independent construction companies in Canada, the US, Australia and the Caribbean.

PCL operations are highly decentralized, with information and communications technology infrastructure and physical assets housed in the main Edmonton campus and at job sites across the globe. Within this distributed environment, communications play a vital role in business operations.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Historically, PCL Constructors met its communications needs through implementation of on-premise phone systems that were installed and maintained by internal staff at multiple locations. But systems administrator John Armstrong found the initial purchase of these phone systems to be "quite expensive," and the need for additional PBX lines added further expense. To determine the best communications solution for its decentralized operations, PCL Constructors tested Hosted PBX vs. on-premise phone solutions at various Edmonton-based sites to compare the cost and other advantages.

SOLUTION

PCL Constructors tested out Hosted PBX based on internal research, word-of-mouth recommendations, and its own experience with other services from the provider (such as Ethernet & LAN Extensions). The goal was to compare performance of the hosted solution with a few phones installed via another provider at a job site at the new Calgary stadium, and a third provider at a hospital construction site.

For its initial trial deployment, PCL signed a service agreement with Primus for Hosted PBX at a site in Edmonton to support a total of 60 seats. As a communications base, the company rented out the ninth floor of an office building in downtown Edmonton, where Primus installed a new, dedicated line to support the Hosted PBX service. As Armstrong described it, the ninth floor houses the main server room and the PBX equipment needed to support five site trailers below that were connected through WiFi (to fibre-based business Internet that Primus also provides to PCL in Edmonton) and phone lines to the office tower.

For PCL, service deployment was minimal, consisting basically of some telephone calls to Primus to order the service, and on-site visits for Primus technical staff to install switching equipment. "It was painless," Armstrong remarked. Primus sent in a couple of employees, and "within three days everything was up and running" – a time frame that is in stark contrast to the month long process that he described as typical with on-premise phone system deployments.

To support the hosted phone system roll out, Primus offered end user training in the Hosted PBX system features that would be appropriate for users: "we decided to keep it simple," Armstrong explained, with a focus on voicemail since the typical user would be a construction labourer and with less need for advanced functionality.

RESULTS

Hosted PBX proves itself on cost, convenience, performance and reliability

"Primus worked out to be better cost wise," said Armstrong, a key benefit over the traditional PBX systems that PCL hoped would be the case when it first considered the Hosted PBX option. "We crunched the numbers [prior to deployment]," said Armstrong, "and we found a real difference – approximately 20 percent" between the hosted and an on-premise solution. However, the Primus solution still needed to prove itself on performance and reliability: "if the performance isn't there, the cost is irrelevant," he added. "I think they are doing fine, and I have had no problems with the Internet or with the phone system." In PCL's business, reliability is a key requirement: if there are any outages or disruptions, hundreds of workers on the job site can be affected.

Because the company maintains multiple sites with discrete project budgets, Primus has also been flexible in accommodating PCL's unique billing and support requirements.

Streamlined solution with quick set-up time

Armstrong characterized the relationship with Primus as one that reduces complexity. In contrast to a traditional on-premise phone installation, for example, he explained that "Primus was a one-stop-shop, offering the phone system, Internet lines and hardware. I don't have to shop all over for a Hosted PBX system here and the hardware there. Primus did all the leg work for us."

In Armstrong's experience, traditional phone system deployments often take up to three weeks to connect trailers on a job site, and then establishing network/Internet connectivity to the server room and phone communications for site users can take several more weeks. With Hosted PBX, this time frame was shrunk to days.

Low to no maintenance, providing greater productivity

PCL has also benefited from the fact that Primus' PBX service is hosted, as this has relieved the tech staff of deployment and maintenance responsibility (allowing them to shift focus to other tasks). "It takes a lot of the load off us," Armstrong noted. "We have sites where I run a traditional PBX myself and it's a big undertaking. If there are any glitches in the system, you can be down for a bit. But since the hosted service is not on site, if we have any issues with power, it won't affect communications on the job site."

With their hosted phone system, if they need to carry out routine maintenance – for example, the addition of new users to the system, or changing a phone extension – PCL makes use of remote management via Primus' web-based portal. For tasks such as updating phone lists, Armstrong finds the portal interface easy to use, and he has designated an on-site administrator (the accountant) in Edmonton who has more knowledge of staff moves, hires and changes to perform this function. "She has had no problems at all using it. It's very straightforward," he added.

Cloud-based solution aligns with mobility requirements of the construction industry

"We're moving more and more to the cloud," Armstrong explained. As cloud solutions are not fixed in any particular location, they offer greater job site mobility for construction companies and ultimately make better business sense. He sees the recent Hosted PBX deployment as "just one more part of this evolutionary change. Cloud services seem to be the way to go now."

PCL deployed Hosted PBX in March of 2014, and the company intends to run the service for a year before making a decision about the extension of the service to support their national phone needs.

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