

TechWeb

The Business Technology Network

IP Telephony Gamble Pays Off For Global Cash Access

By Phil Britt, Networking Pipeline

In only six months after installing an new IP capability on the back end, Global Cash Access, a Las Vegas-Nev.-based company that provides credit checks for local casinos, saw a 63 percent decline in agent-handled calls, a similar decrease in call waiting time, projected a \$600,000 cost savings in the first year as well as improved customer service and expects even more benefits in the future as the IP functionality is extended more to the front end.

The casinos were counting on Global Cash Access to provide credit primarily for high rollers, or "whales" in industry parlance. These gamblers often rely on credit to make large wagers, which the casinos want them to make, but only if they are good credit risks. So they call Global Cash Access to learn if these gamblers have outstanding markers at other casinos.

Casinos relied on Global Cash Access increasingly over the last several years to provide credit information on gamblers, both via the company's credit database and through connecting callers to other casinos that may not have yet reported recent outstanding debts for high rollers. While that was good for business, the growing call volume was overloading the existing IVR, according to Ted Brandes, Global Cash Access telecom manager. "We needed to improve our service levels; they weren't acceptable for our clients. We were looking for a contact center rather than just a call center."

The company also wanted to reduce the calls that live agents needed to handle. More than 60 percent of those calls were from casinos that needed to be transferred to other casinos to check on a high roller's current credit status.

So the company wanted to be able to handle voice and e-mail communications through one system rather than two separate ones. But any upgrade was going to be done in separate steps, so the first piece of equipment, had to work with both new IP and legacy analog front-end equipment.

"We wanted to do more than just upgrade our IVR," Brandes says. "We wanted to be Web-enabled. We wanted to be able to manage data and voice communications together. We also had a need to centralize some of our procedures in central credit."

Traditional call center platforms didn't make sense because they don't integrate online capabilities. An increasing amount of Global Cash Access' requests were coming via e-mail.

The company was seeking a telecommunications system that could automatically answer calls, and integrate with the credit system and e-mails would allow the company to meet those needs, while VoIP access would position it for future benefits

from better communications efficiency. So Global Cash Access worked with Rocklin, Calif.-based Special Order Systems, a company that provides and integrates telecommunications hardware and software as well as providing telecom consulting services.

Special Order Systems installed Interactive Intelligence's (Indianapolis, Ind.) Customer Interaction Center application, which serves as an IP-based phone system, and gives enterprise users complete voicemail, fax, ACD, IVR and auto attendant capabilities as well as unified messaging, remote system access, real-time presence management, and pre-integrations to CRM and other business applications. The platform was integrated with two Cisco 3825 routers to provide analogue and digital communications support.

Now the casinos simply call into the system, enter an ID, then enter the ID of another casino (if seeking a transfer), rather than involving a human agent. Credit information on the Global Access System can also be accessed without agent interaction. This enables agents to concentrate on other customer service needs, Brandes says.

The platform's architecture enables Global Cash Access to use Customer Interaction Center with IP- and analog-based equipment on the front and back ends and to add IP equipment as the needs grow.

Currently, Brandes and a few other executives have IP phones at their desks, but full-scale implementation of handsets in the company is still at least a few months away. Eventually, IP phones will be added in casinos and other remote locations, according to Brandes.

As much as anything else, Global Cash Access officials like the flexibility that IP provides, Brandes says. "There's almost and endless list of potential benefits in cost savings and service."

The company is just beginning to look into establishing a presence in Europe. While any contact center there would be primarily to service clients on that side of the Atlantic, the European site could also sever as a backup site for the Las Vegas headquarters. This would be much less expensive using VoIP hardware and software than analogue equipment, Brandes says.

Another future benefit that Brandes foresees is allowing call center agents to work from home with the same capabilities as onsite agents.

According to Lawrence McNutt, director of special services for Special Order Systems, this type of virtual call center is growing in popularity as more companies take advantage of VoIP.

McNutt adds that many companies that provide call center services for others as well as internal call centers are relying on automated systems to help them handle increased communication demands (calls and e-mails) while working with small staffs.