

Typex integrates voice communications on IBM System i



Overview

■ The Challenge

Enable greater flexibility and mobility for employees; reduce the cost of voice communications between company sites; enable the integration of voice communications with ERP, CRM and other core business systems; simplify and demystify the switch to IP telephony

■ The Solution

Implemented an IBM System i IP Telephony solution, with the 3Com IP Telephony Suite running in a Linux partition on an IBM System i5 platform; integrating voice communications with IBM Workplace and enabling customers to trial the software on a special Web site

■ The Benefits

Free calls between office locations and to mobile employees; ability to use any Session Initiation Protocol (SIP)-compliant handsets or software clients; "follow-me" numbers enable employees to have just a single phone number wherever they are; ability to extend core business systems by integrating voice communications

Typex Group plc (www.typex.com) is a UK-based systems integrator and networking specialist with a global customer base. The company sells IT infrastructure solutions, with a particular focus on integrated networking solutions, the IBM System i platform and IBM Lotus software. In collaboration with IBM, Typex runs a product evaluation Web site called Playplace, where customers can trial products such as IBM Workplace and other software free of charge.

Moving to new office accommodation gave Typex an opportunity to revise its own communications infrastructure. With growing demand both internally and from customers for IP-based telephony, Typex opted to implement IBM System i IP Telephony: 3Com IP Telephony Suite on the IBM System i platform.

Deni Wilson, Managing Director of Typex, explains: "Many of our customers and our internal sales team had been pushing for us to add an IP telephony solution to our portfolio. The launch of the IBM System i IP Telephony solution coincided with our planned office move, and the fact that the solution is fully integrated on the tried-and-trusted System i platform gave us the confidence to go down the voice-over-IP route.

"The new solution supports more flexible working, and we expect that it could help significantly reduce our

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*Deni Wilson
Managing Director
Typex*

long-term costs. What’s more, we see tremendous potential for integrating voice communications with core business systems on the System i platform, both for ourselves and for our customers.”

Reducing costs, increasing flexibility

Typex employees frequently travel to customer sites around the world, and are highly mobile even when working in the UK. To support this workforce, the company wanted to provide a truly flexible communications platform, but without introducing complexity or high costs.

The potential benefits of IP telephony were clear: by routing voice calls across the Internet fabric rather than through conventional exchanges, Typex could reduce its networking costs, enable free long-distance calls back to the office, and easily assign “follow-me” phone numbers that would connect to employees wherever they might be in the world.

“IP telephony offers significant advantages for multi-site businesses, especially those spread across several countries,” says Deni Wilson. “Routing calls across the Internet allows such companies to place free phone calls at all times between different offices. And of course, all mobile workers are also able to make and receive calls as if they were in an office location.”

Deni Wilson notes that a UK-wide switch to the IP telephony standard is slated for 2012, and that this was one

reason for the internal switch. More importantly, Typex wanted to be able to direct calls more easily to its mobile workforce.

“The 3Com solution on the System i platform translates the standard phone number into the employee’s current IP address, which could be a handset in the office or at home, or a voice-over-IP client on a laptop or a mobile phone. So each employee needs just one phone number wherever they are in the world.”

Quick and easy deployment

The 3Com IP Telephony Suite combines messaging, conferencing, presence and contact centre capabilities with all the phone features of a traditional PBX system. It runs in a Linux partition on any IBM POWER5 processor-based System i5 server with i5/OS V5R3 or above (Typex runs the suite on its i5 550).

The integrated IBM and 3Com solution is compatible with all standard SIP-based software and equipment – giving businesses full flexibility and no vendor lock-in for the future.

“We are using a mixture of the latest 3Com RoHS-compliant handsets and Convergence Center Clients (softphones) for our IP Telephony,” says Deni Wilson.

“The solution was quick to deploy and is very easy to manage – and since we were already running our business on the System i platform, adding IP telephony was cost-effective and kept

our infrastructure simple. We are now integrating IP telephony capabilities into our Playplace Web site, so that customers can try the solution for themselves.”

Typex was among the first companies in the world to install IP telephony on the System i platform. This early-adopter experience, together with the company’s long-standing specialisation in high-end integrated networking solutions, puts Typex in a strong position to design and deliver IBM System i IP Telephony solutions to other System i5 users.

Deni Wilson adds, “One of the particularly strong benefits of the System i5 platform is its scalability. Many other IP telephony solutions are based on Intel-architecture servers, and scaling up tends to involve adding large numbers of stand-alone servers – which multiplies the potential points of failure, and adds to the management costs.

“With System i5, businesses can enlarge the Linux partition as demand grows, and can add additional processors within the same physical chassis, helping to keep the infrastructure manageable as the IP telephony solution grows.”

Reliable voice communications platform

For many businesses, voice communications are business-critical, and so it is essential to choose a reliable platform for IP telephony. The IBM System i platform is renowned for its physical robustness and high

availability, and a number of third-party solutions enable multiple System i servers to be clustered together for very high protection against downtime. The 3Com IP Telephony application can automatically replicate data to a second partition or a separate physical machine, providing an extra layer of protection against disaster.

“At Typex, we would not be comfortable trusting a less reliable platform than System i to run our voice communications,” says Deni Wilson.

“The tight integration between the i5 platform and 3Com software helps simplify management and can help extend existing business applications by adding voice capabilities. For example, CRM and ERP systems could gain “click to call” functionality, and customer-facing Web sites could have calling facilities added to them.”

She concludes, “Many businesses are realising that IP telephony is a great way to help cut calling costs, gain greater flexibility and staff mobility, and start unifying their voice and data communications. The aggressive pricing of the IBM System i IP Telephony solution represents an excellent opportunity to move to voice-over-IP.”

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