



Unified Swiss Council for Accident Prevention Reduces IT Cost with Unified Communications

Overview

Country or Region: Switzerland

Industry: Government

Customer Profile

A private foundation based in Berne, Switzerland, bfu has 130 employees in various locations. bfu advises organizations and individuals on safety issues related to sports venues, roads, and homes.

Business Situation

bfu wanted to build on its existing voice over IP (VoIP) infrastructure by moving to a single application to unite voice, e-mail, IM, and presence awareness.

Solution

bfu deployed a unified communications solution based on Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007. Employees use Microsoft Office Communicator 2007 for telephone and IM.

Benefits

- Integration of communication channels
- Location-independent communications
- Reduced travel costs
- Reduced IT administration
- Improved security
- Faster helpline response times

“In a survey of 17 users of Communications Server, eight said they could use the new system very well, and the other nine said they had no problems. All of them said, I wouldn’t give it back’.”

Peter Schönthal, Head of Information Technology, bfu

The Swiss Council for Accident Prevention bfu works to improve safety in the fields of road traffic, leisure, and sport. Most of the foundation’s 130 employees work in Berne, with the remainder in five regional offices across Switzerland. All rely on e-mail, instant messaging (IM), and telephony for collaboration with one another and with external organizations. Forward-thinking in its approach to technology, bfu replaced its PBX system with e-phone in 2004. The IT team later installed Microsoft® Office Live Communications Server 2005, which employees used for IM and presence awareness. To build a truly unified solution, bfu recently deployed Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007, alongside Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging. Employees now work seamlessly between voice, e-mail, and IM, with Web conferencing planned for immediate deployment.

“Office Communications Server 2007 means I can take my portable computer home in the evenings and my colleagues can still contact me easily. I spend fewer evenings in the office now.”

Peter Schönthal, Head of Information Technology, bfu

Situation

The Swiss Council for Accident Prevention (bfu) is a private foundation that provides safety advice to local authorities, institutions, and individuals. bfu has 130 employees, the majority of whom work in the main office in Berne, Switzerland, while others are located in the foundation's seven smaller offices covering Switzerland's German, Italian, and French speaking regions.

bfu covers safety concerns related to roadways, sports venues, and housing, compiling statistics about accidents in these areas and then publishing safety recommendations related to road safety for schools, protective equipment for sports, and structural engineering. The foundation also runs a helpline that answers queries from companies and from members of the public. While the majority of the foundation's workforce is office-based, 15 of its employees are engineers, psychologists, and consultants who conduct surveys at accident sites. Half of these employees work out of the Berne headquarters, while the others work from the regional offices.

bfu employees depend heavily on e-mail and telephony for communication with one another, especially between the foundation's headquarters and its smaller local offices. What's more, bfu works with and requires reliable communications with several partners at federal, cantonal, and local government levels, and also with national institutions, international research agencies, and trade organizations. These relationships are essential to collating and evaluating accurate data and to drawing up safety guidelines for a variety of customers.

The IT team at bfu has always been forward thinking when it comes to applying technology to help employees collaborate internally and with other organizations. Unified communications—and, in particular,

voice over IP (VoIP)—is a concept that the team has been quick to adopt.

In 2004, with assistance from Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner webcall, bfu replaced its Siemens HiCom Private Branch Exchange (PBX) system with a VoIP solution. The VoIP system was based on e-phone, an IP-based software solution that was integrated with Microsoft Exchange Server 2003. e-phone was created by media-streams, a company that Microsoft acquired in late 2005. Peter Schönthal, Head of Information Technology at bfu, says, “We wanted to replace our PBX with VoIP, but we didn't want to deploy a hardware-based solution because it would be difficult to adapt it to changes in the future.”

The Microsoft e-phone gateway connected call information from the foundation's Euro-ISDN line into its local area network (LAN), and then to the e-phone client. The client was integrated into Microsoft Office Outlook® and installed on users' workstations and portable computers. Regional offices used a virtual private network (VPN) to access the LAN. With this solution, employees could call colleagues without using a desktop phone, simply by using the click-to-dial feature of the Microsoft Office Outlook 2003 messaging and collaboration client and by speaking into a headset plugged into the USB port of the computer. Employees could handle both e-mail and voice calls on a single device. bfu also developed a solution in-house that used Telephony Application Programming Interface (TAPI) to display incoming call details to users. Users also used this solution to make external calls using e-phone.

In 2005, bfu deployed Microsoft Office Live Communications Server 2005, a unified communications environment that uses the Active Directory® service to integrate with the Microsoft Office System and the Windows Server® operating system. Employees could then use presence and instant messaging

(IM) to determine colleagues' availability and to communicate in real time. Remote employees could use the IM and presence features to communicate with coworkers at the main office, and could also use advanced federation technology to share IM sessions with other organizations, without the need for a VPN.

While bfu had taken important steps toward unifying its communications, employees still switched between Microsoft e-phone for phone calls and Live Communications Server 2005 for IM. The IT team knew that uniting voice, presence, e-mail, and IM in a single system would deliver the full potential of the move from PBX to VoIP. "When we heard about Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007, we knew that it was the obvious next step to build on our existing investment," says Schönthal. "We had already established a system by which employees could use their computers to make and receive voice calls. We wanted to consolidate this further by delivering all communication methods through a single application."

Solution

In May 2007, Schönthal worked with two webcall specialists in the deployment of Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 and Microsoft Office Communicator 2007. The first phase of the project, the installation of two new server computers running Communications Server, took just one day. The architecture included a Web Access Server, Archiving Server, Edge Server and a Mediation Server. The latter is housed in a Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) to IP media gateway, the Dialogic® DMG4000. The gateway reroutes calls between the Euro-ISDN and the bfu IT infrastructure.

The IT team is rolling out the Communications Server solution in phases, to minimize disruption and to make the training process

easier by coordinating with other upcoming deployments, including upgrading the foundation's computers from the Windows® XP operating system to the Windows Vista® operating system, and upgrading the company's intranet to Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007.

So far, 29 employees in Berne and two employees in the regional offices use Office Communications Server 2007 for voice, IM, and presence. A further 80 employees use it for IM and presence, alongside e-phone for voice calls. By May 2008, all 130 employees will use the Microsoft voice solution for all communication, discontinuing use of e-phone. In addition, bfu currently has four federated partners and expects to increase this number to 10 within the next year. Federated companies have an agreement to exchange contact and presence information, which helps them to collaborate more easily. The solution includes a server that ensures the secure passage of information between these companies.

With the earlier installation of Live Communications Server 2005 providing many of the foundations for Office Communications Server 2007, the IT team was able to complete the full deployment in one week. "We were already familiar with the technology, and our established working relationship with webcall helped us to make a smooth transition to Office Communications Server 2007," says Schönthal. The team incorporated the existing CMS solution easily using the application programming interfaces (APIs) within Office Communications Server 2007.

Even though bfu employees use a mixture of workstations, portable computers, smart phones, and other mobile devices, migrating the employees to the new system took less than three minutes each. "The process is incredibly easy—whether you're moving a

single employee or a whole department to Communications Server,” says Schönthal. The team also deployed Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging alongside Communications Server. While Communications Server supports all real-time voice activities, Exchange Server Unified Messaging delivers voice-mail messages as e-mail attachments. Employees are using the LG-Nortel USB Phone 8501 for voice communication.

Employees can use the Office Communicator 2007 interface to place or receive calls internally or to external numbers, both computer-to-computer and computer-to-PSTN. Moreover, they can access e-mail, IM, and presence from within the same application. Integration with the company’s corporate directories and intranet gives employees additional contact details and presence information.

In a further deployment phase, Schönthal will introduce Web cameras to take advantage of the solution’s video and Web conferencing features.

Benefits

By transferring its telephony to Exchange Server Unified Messaging and Office Communications Server 2007, bfu has removed the traditional division between voice communications and e-mail. Employees now move seamlessly between these channels, and the IT team has just one software-based system to manage, rather than two. These benefits will extend to the foundation’s customer relationships, and will reduce inter-office meetings—and the associated travel costs—through improved remote communication.

Integration of All Communication Channels Boosts Collaboration

Employees now have a single, intuitive interface for initiating and receiving voice

calls, e-mail messages, and IM exchanges. “In a survey of 17 users of Communications Server, eight said they could use the new system very well, and the other nine said they had no problems. All of them said, ‘I wouldn’t give it back’,” Schönthal says.

Employees can also contact colleagues directly from the company’s intranet, which houses a custom document management solution based on Office SharePoint Portal Server 2007. Now, each document opens with a sidebar showing the contact details and presence status of the author, so that the reader can send an IM or make a voice call to the author without needing to open another application.

“With Office Communications Server 2007, we can review a document and collaborate with the author instantly,” Schönthal says. “And because all the communication tools are in one place, it’s easier to pick the most appropriate method for a particular context or individual. If I’m in a conference call and a colleague calls me, I can send an IM to say that I will call back in an hour, for example.” Similarly, if an employee sees that an exchange in IM is developing into an in-depth conversation, he or she can start a voice call with a single click of the mouse button. Schönthal says: “Employees using the solution no longer have to search for numbers or switch to other applications to change communication channel, while information that has already been exchanged by e-mail or IM is visible in the same window as the voice call. Rather than spelling out a Web address, they type it while they are talking, which is quicker and less error-prone. This definitely improves employees’ productivity.”

Turning a conversation into a conference is equally easy. Employees can start a peer-to-peer conversation and add other people by drag and drop, or reply to all senders of an e-

mail with a voice call, directly from within Microsoft Office Outlook 2007. Conference calls can also be scheduled from within Outlook, with participants joining with one click directly from the meeting invitation.

Employees Stay in Touch Whatever Their Location

Employees now have one seamless experience wherever they are, through their portable computers, via the Web on another computer, or by using HTC Windows Mobile®-powered smartphones running the Microsoft unified communications solution. In other words, employees can log on to their Office Communicator 2007 accounts from any location where there is an Internet connection, and colleagues and customers can contact them by voice call, e-mail, or IM, just as if they were at their desk.

Like many of today's office workers, bfu employees spend much of the working day away from their desks. Employees who benefit from the Communications Server solution include:

- Employees at the Berne headquarters who attend regular meetings or who don't have an assigned desk. With Office Communicator 2007 installed on their portable computers, they can access all the communication features provided by Office Communication Server 2007 while they are on the move.
- Apprentices who move from division to division every three months. Regardless of their location, they remain contactable through their listing in Office Communicator 2007.
- Office-based staff who also work from home using portable computers. Now their address book and their access to presence awareness and IM moves with them. Now, colleagues simply click on their name and call them at home.
- IT staff who often need to answer help-desk calls in the evening from home.

"Office Communications Server 2007 means I can take my portable computer home in the evenings and my colleagues can still contact me easily. I spend fewer evenings in the office now," says Schöenthal.

Additionally, employees can log on to Office Communicator 2007 while in a meeting or while on a mobile phone, without logging off at their desks. "This new feature of Communicator is great for users who move locations throughout the day. For example, while I'm talking to you now, I'm still logged on at my desk, and if I leave the office to attend another meeting, I can log on with my smartphone too, so I can be sure of receiving my messages wherever I am," says Schöenthal. "This makes it much easier for me to work efficiently, with the confidence of being up-to-date with my colleagues."

Video Conferencing Set to Halve Travel Costs

When bfu activates the video-conferencing functionality of Office Communications Server 2007, Schöenthal anticipates a significant reduction in travel costs. Currently, employees in the regional offices travel up to 200km to Berne twice each month. "If we have one-to-one video calls and videoconferencing I hope we will be able to cut our monthly travel costs by 50 percent. I think conversations are more successful if you can see the other person's body language, and concentration tends to be better. And with federated calls through Communications Server using 64-bit audio, the sound quality is so good it's almost like being face-to-face," says Schöenthal.

bfu also plans to use videoconferencing with federated partners within Switzerland and beyond as soon as they also switch to Office Communications Server 2007. Again, this will reduce travel costs and increase employees' productivity through fewer journeys.

Employees will also use videoconferencing to hold press conferences from their offices. "Our public relations team will be able to show journalists new safety devices or provide slide presentations by using the Microsoft Office Live Meeting Web conferencing service capabilities of Office Communications Server 2007," says Schönthal. "With less travel, it will be easier for them to use their time productively."

Active Directory Integration Saves Administration Time and Costs

When bfu hires a new employee, the IT team can start the employee's e-mail, IM, and telephony services by entering one set of data into Active Directory. This creates a time saving of around 50 percent compared to before the Communications Server solution was deployed, according to Schönthal. "With the Siemens HiCom PBX system, we had to enter employee data twice—once in the IT infrastructure and once in the telephony system. Now, all details for each user are in a single address book in a single location."

Likewise, altering an employee's details, such as surname, takes less than a minute. Says Schönthal: "With the HiCom system, it cost more than U.S.\$80 to change the display name on a telephone. Now, it costs nothing."

Control over Functions Improves Security Across All Channels

"There are advantages to Communications Server for the IT team too," says Schönthal. "We can customize the solution according to the role of each user—so we can allow someone to use IM but not to send data files, for example. And we also have the reassurance that all information is encrypted, including internal voice calls."

Presence Awareness and IM Improve Customer Service and Save Time

Office Communications Server 2007 includes enhanced IM through integration with public

networks such as Yahoo!, AOL, and the Windows Live™ network of Internet services. This extension of IM, alongside presence awareness, has made the communication process far more efficient for bfu. It ensures that employees can still communicate in real time with their colleagues outside of the organization. They know when the recipient is available and can avoid the time-consuming process of repeated telephone calls and voice-mail messages.

Schönthal says, "If someone working the help desk receives a query that they need to refer to an engineer, they can immediately see who is available. It makes it much easier to locate the right person and give the customer an answer quickly."

With Office Communications Server 2007, bfu is realizing the full potential of its original move from a PBX system to a VoIP-based system. "Communications Server is already saving us time and reducing costs through consolidated management, as well as improving the way we collaborate with one another and with our customers—all through a one-week deployment process. This solution gives us the ability to communicate in a way that is more sophisticated, and yet simpler."

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to: www.microsoft.com

For more information about webcall GmbH products and services, call +44 (44) 325 6633 or visit the Web site at: www.webcall.ch

For more information about The Swiss Council for Accident Prevention (bfu) products and services, call +41 31 390 22 22 or visit the Web site at: www.bfu.ch

Microsoft Office System

The Microsoft Office system is the business world's chosen environment for information work, providing the programs, servers, and services that help you succeed by transforming information into impact.

For more information about the Microsoft Office system, go to: www.microsoft.com/office

Software and Services

- Microsoft Office
 - 2007 Microsoft Office system
 - Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003
 - Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007
 - Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007
 - Microsoft Office Communicator 2007
 - Microsoft Office Live Communications Server 2005

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2005
 - Microsoft Exchange Server 2007
 - Microsoft e-phone Server
- Windows Vista Enterprise
- Windows XP

Hardware

- Dialogic® DMG4000 Media Gateway
- LG-Nortel USB Phone IP8501

Partners

- webcall GmbH