



Communications Solution Increases Productivity for Global Conferencing

Overview

Country or Region: Global
Industry: Telecommunications

Customer Profile

InterCall—a subsidiary of West Corporation and one of the largest conferencing providers in the world—provides conferencing services to 81 percent of the Fortune 100.

Business Situation

InterCall's global work force desired additional tools for communicating and collaborating worldwide. InterCall also wanted employees to experience a unified communications solution that is popular with its own customers.

Solution

InterCall deployed Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007 so mobile workers are now better connected.

Benefits

- Potential to save employees 15,000 hours annually
- Increases collaboration
- Eases IT support
- Improves customer support

“Office Communications Server 2007 collaboration tools support the fast, informal communications that any business needs to thrive.”

Ken Kurz, Unified Communications Program Manager, InterCall

InterCall, the world's leading conferencing and collaboration service provider, offers a range of unified communications solutions, including design, implementation, and adoption services. InterCall wanted to use unified communications internally, to streamline communications and to become more familiar with issues its customers face. The solution needed to help teams connect more easily and provide flexible tools to support cross-functional workgroups. Many of its customers use Microsoft® technology, so InterCall worked with SKT Business Communication Solutions to deploy Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007. Now, InterCall employees have access to voice over IP, instant messaging, presence, and collaboration tools. InterCall estimates that the new solution saved each pilot user about 30 minutes a week and could save 15,000 hours annually when deployed companywide.



Situation

InterCall, a subsidiary of West Corporation, provides integrated conferencing and collaboration communications solutions to customers worldwide, including 81 percent of the Fortune 1000. In addition to offering its own proprietary audio, video, and Web conferencing products, InterCall is a reseller of Microsoft® services and other third party technologies. With corporate headquarters in Chicago, Illinois, InterCall employs more than 3,000 people throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. InterCall has received numerous awards recognizing its innovation and leading position in the marketplace.

In addition to providing conferencing solutions, InterCall works with partners and customers to design and deploy unified communications solutions. In keeping with the company's reputation for innovation and leadership in its industry, InterCall wanted to expand its own communication and collaboration capabilities—a move that would both maintain its leadership position and improve internal company processes. The change would also strengthen the company's firsthand experience with the tools that its customers are piloting and deploying.

"InterCall is committed to using and validating the technologies we provide for our customers," says Ken Kurz, Unified Communications Program Manager at InterCall. "Using the products that we support reinforces our credibility with customers and helps everyone in the company be responsive to customer needs and concerns."

Internally, InterCall wanted to streamline communications among its employees. As part of a geographically dispersed work force, InterCall employees must frequently communicate with team members in

different locations. In addition, many InterCall employees alternate between working in their offices, at home, or in remote locations. Both of these factors sometimes created confusion over how best to reach coworkers.

InterCall had previously deployed Microsoft Office Live Communications Server 2005 but wanted a new solution that would expand the company's communication and collaboration tools. InterCall wanted to provide its work force with more detailed presence information, click-to-call dialing, and simpler call routing and forwarding—including to mobile devices—that would support a company objective of answering all calls no later than the second ring and send missed calls both to voice mail and to the user's e-mail inbox. The new solution also needed to support voice over IP (VoIP), integrate with an existing Private Branch Exchange (PBX) telephone system, and provide desktop and mobile call management features in order to enhance communications options for the company's global work-force teams.

Solution

After analyzing its own requirements and the needs of many customers who are implementing Microsoft unified communications technologies, InterCall decided to deploy a solution based on Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 and the Microsoft Office Communicator 2007 client. "Our customers were asking a lot of questions about Office Communications Server 2007," says Kurz. "Because it is becoming so widely adopted, we saw the need to develop relationships with our partners and expand our own expertise where this technology was concerned, so that we could best serve our customers."

"Office Communications Server 2007 helps companies extend existing telephony platforms without the cost of ripping and replacing."

Kipp Adkins, National Channel Manager,
SKT Business Communication Solutions

To help with the deployment, InterCall selected SKT Business Communication Solutions (SKT), a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner based in Kansas that specializes in implementing Office Communications Server 2007, Microsoft Exchange Server, and telephony systems. "SKT consultants have a strong record with Office Communications Server 2007 deployments," says Kurz. "In particular, they have expertise with both Microsoft technology and Cisco unified communications telephony, which is a combination that we use at InterCall and also find in our customer base quite often."

Kipp Adkins, National Channel Manager at SKT, isn't surprised by the strong interest in Microsoft unified communications technologies that InterCall is encountering among its customers. "Office Communications Server 2007 helps companies extend existing telephony platforms without the cost of ripping and replacing," says Adkins. "When you add the collaboration tools, the familiar Microsoft interface, and the ease of controlling it all right from your desktop, you've got a very compelling case for deployment."

InterCall and SKT began work on the deployment in October 2008 and completed the integration with InterCall's Cisco PBX system in November. InterCall also upgraded its enterprise messaging software to Microsoft Exchange Server 2007. The company rolled out the solution to a pilot group of 115 people in early December.

The pilot group consisted of representatives from a range of anticipated user groups, including InterCall sales, operations engineering, product management, marketing, customer care operations, and executive personnel. "Because our primary goal with this project

was to increase our ability to support customers, we wanted a really broad cross-section of the company in our pilot group," says Kurz. "We wanted people throughout InterCall not only to see the benefits of the solution for themselves but also to be able to understand any issues that our customers might experience."

The new solution's presence feature shows office-based and mobile InterCall users which colleagues are available to collaborate and how best to reach them—all from within the Microsoft Office applications that employees use every day. Users control how much presence information they release to different coworkers; for example, a user might share more detailed information with fellow members of a project team than with the company as a whole. Because the solution is integrated with the InterCall Cisco Unified Communications Manager PBX, presence status updates automatically when a user is on the phone.

With the server-hosted group instant messaging (IM) in Office Communications Server 2007, users can initiate IM conversations with the click of a button. During IM conversations, users can easily escalate to voice calls or video conferences, invite others to join, and exchange data by using application and desktop sharing.

The solution's intelligent call routing eliminates the need for InterCall employees to keep track of numbers for colleagues' office, home, and mobile phones. Instead, a user simply clicks a contact's name and the call is either routed to the communications device that the contact has specified or rings multiple devices simultaneously. With the Unified Messaging server role activated in Exchange Server 2007, users receive voice-mail messages and missed-call notifications in the same inbox where they

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receive e-mail messages. InterCall employees can access this inbox from their workstations, portable computers, or mobile phones.

InterCall also deployed two Microsoft RoundTable™ conferencing and collaboration devices. With a RoundTable device, which provides a 360-degree view of the conference room, users who join meetings remotely can hear and see colleagues as if they were physically present. With the solution’s on-premises Web conferencing capability, InterCall employees inside and outside the firewall can create and join Web conferences, share desktops, exchange notes and documents, and watch media files. Users can also record meetings for future reference.

By activating the solution’s federation feature, InterCall is able to exchange presence information and communicate with partners and customers in an authenticated, encrypted, and managed environment. As a Microsoft-certified audio conferencing provider, InterCall can also offer an interface for dial-in audio conferencing services on InterCall’s global conferencing platform for Office Communications Server 2007 customers who are hosting Web conferences. And by using the solution’s public IM connectivity option, InterCall users can exchange data with customers or other external contacts who are using public IM services.

The deployment was completed on time, with no major obstacles. “We had a very smooth transition to the new solution,” says Kurz. “To make sure that our users felt comfortable with the new tools, we took advantage of an internal group that we use for customized training delivery to customers. As a result, we have had very fast uptake.” Companywide deployment will take place after InterCall upgrades to

Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2, which is scheduled for later this year.

Benefits

The Microsoft unified communications solution is helping InterCall employees to communicate and collaborate more effectively and could potentially save InterCall more than 15,000 work hours annually. In addition, IT support is simpler and more efficient. As a result of this pilot experience, InterCall feels well prepared both to support its customers who are interested in incorporating Office Communications Server 2007 into their communications infrastructure and to team with SKT as go-to-market partners for implementing similar solutions on behalf of customers.

Could Save Employees 15,000 Hours Annually

With the new solution’s server-hosted group IM, enhanced presence information, intelligent call routing, and unified messaging features, pilot users at InterCall can connect more easily and efficiently, says Kurz. “Now, with Office Communications Server 2007, it’s just one click to connect with the right people, whether they are in the office, in a meeting, or traveling.”

Increases Collaboration

Pilot-group users have already come to rely on the solution’s IM and presence features for fast and easy collaboration. “We rolled out a lot of Office Communications Server 2007 features, but we use IM and presence most heavily,” says Kurz. “With users in multiple locations, I can’t overemphasize how valuable it is to know who is available and how best to reach them.”

The ability to easily connect with colleagues has resulted in improved productivity and

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Program Manager, InterCall

stronger customer relationships. “Now, salespeople sitting in a customer’s office can relay questions about products or accounts to just the right person and receive an answer right away,” says Kurz. “Someone designing a customer solution can get technical information in seconds, instead of having to wait for an answer to an e-mail message. Office Communications Server 2007 collaboration tools support the fast, informal communications that any business needs to thrive.”

Eases IT Support

With access to the new solution’s communication and collaboration tools, IT workers are even better able to support users companywide. “The ability to switch easily between IMs and phone calls, not to mention desktop and other data sharing, is especially well-suited to the help-desk environment,” says Kurz. “Office Communications Server 2007 supports rapid response to and resolution of trouble tickets. Faster problem solving not only reduces users’ frustration, it also lets them return to productive work.”

Improves Customer Support

One of the greatest benefits of the Office Communications Server 2007 deployment, according to Kurz, is that it puts InterCall in an even stronger position to support customers who are planning similar deployments. “We proved not only that this technology has powerful contributions for an enterprise like ours, but also that we could conduct a successful pilot with Microsoft and SKT as partners,” Kurz says. “That makes us confident that we can help customers who are going through the same thing, whether their deployments involve integration with a PBX, migration from Live Communications Server 2005, multiple locations, or all of the above.”

The experience was important not just for technical staff but also for the sales team. “Having witnessed and experienced the whole deployment, our salespeople now have firsthand knowledge about all aspects of an Office Communications Server 2007 deployment,” says Kurz. “As a result, they can be very responsive to customers’ questions.”

This responsiveness will be important for InterCall, because Kurz expects the strong interest in Office Communications Server 2007 to continue among the company’s customers. “This technology really enhances workflow and collaboration,” he says. “The time savings alone make Office Communications Server 2007 something that any business has to seriously consider deploying, but the real story is even larger than that.” Adkins elaborates: “With this technology, businesses can plan strategically, instead of just thinking tactically about platforms. The power of Office Communications Server 2007 is not just in the specific tools and capabilities that it provides—and those are significant—but in the possibilities it opens for an enterprise’s future.”

For More Information

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