

CASE STUDY

CENTRAL TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

Banking IT Provider Increases Productivity with Unified Communications Solution

HEADQUARTERS: Midwest

INDUSTRY: IT Provider



DESCRIPTION: Central Technology Services (CTS) provides operations and technology services for 13 community banks in the Midwest. CTS is a wholly owned subsidiary of Central Banccompany, a financial holding company with 3,500 employees, U.S.\$8.5 billion in assets, and approximately 175 ATM locations serving markets in Missouri, Illinois, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Central Banccompany and CTS are both based in Jefferson City, Missouri.

SITUATION

The IT environment that CTS administers for Central Banccompany includes about 500 server computers and more than 400 routers and switches supporting 3,500 desktop computers across 125 locations. The voice environment includes 60 Mitel 3300 IP Communications Platform Private Branch Exchange (PBX) systems and one networked Cisco CallManager PBX system. Rick DeClerk, Manager of Network Communications at CTS, says, "We also have an older Active Voice voice-mail system that didn't integrate with other forms of communication."

CTS has several technicians who frequently change locations because they travel to various banks to address problems. They found that communication could be difficult while traveling. "With our phone system, you didn't get indicators of missed telephone calls unless you were at your desk," says DeClerk. "So you had to proactively check your voice mail to see if you had any messages." Because e-mail is the primary form of communication at CTS, the technicians preferred to be contacted by e-mail—but sometimes they were needed on the phone.

The result was difficulty keeping these remote employees connected. Mike Nanneman, Manager of Network Services at CTS, says, "We wanted to allow these technicians to continue conducting the business of the organization without having to make a conscious decision about their phones with each status and location change." Additionally, some users had multiple base locations but were unable to use a single company phone extension as their primary phone number.

OVERVIEW

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Financial services—Banking

CUSTOMER PROFILE

Central Technology Services (CTS) provides IT services to 13 community banks in the Midwest operated by Central Banccompany. Based in Jefferson City, Missouri, Central Banccompany has 3,500 employees.

BUSINESS SITUATION

CTS wanted to integrate its voice and e-mail systems, improve the productivity of employees, and provide a foundation for future communications enhancements at all Central Banccompany banks.

SOLUTION

CTS deployed a solution based on Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007 and Microsoft Exchange Server 2007.

BENEFITS

- Improved productivity
- Dynamic presence for users
- Improved access across locations
- Unified voice and e-mail messaging
- Cost-effective foundation for future

CTS hoped that a software-powered unified communications solution could integrate the phone and e-mail systems to improve the productivity of remote workers. It also hoped that such a solution could set the foundation for cost savings in its long-term plans to expand employee communications options and to improve the communications infrastructure for all Central Bancompany banks.

A COMMUNICATIONS TOOL THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Central Technology Services uses many Microsoft® products. To stay current on its software, it implemented Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 in February 2008 and Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 three months later. CTS then saw an opportunity to use these products to integrate its voice and e-mail systems. DeClerk says, “We were anxious to move in the direction of unified communications by using Exchange Server 2007 as our voice-mail product as well.”

In October 2008, CTS decided to unify its communications with a Microsoft solution. “We’ve been a Microsoft shop for a long time, and Microsoft unified communications came to the forefront when we were looking at our enterprise agreements and other options,” recalls DeClerk.

For technical assistance, CTS turned to our Professional Services. A Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, we are a national leader in integrating voice, video, messaging, and collaboration. “They provided the knowledge to bridge the gaps between our Exchange Server 2007 experts, our Office Communications Server 2007 experts, and our voice experts. They helped us to get the voice traffic to pass between the PBXs and Office Communications Server 2007 and to deploy the Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging server role,” DeClerk says.

CTS runs Office Communications Server 2007 and the Microsoft Office Communicator 2007 client. The solution includes presence awareness features, which display other people’s availability and status—whether they are free to talk, busy, in a meeting, or traveling—from within Microsoft productivity software such as the Microsoft Office Outlook® 2007 messaging and collaboration client. Users can then initiate phone calls or instant messaging (IM) conversations at the click of a button. Office Communications Server 2007 also integrates with other software at CTS such as Microsoft Office Share-Point® Server 2007.

By using Exchange Server 2007 with Unified Messaging, users now receive both e-mail and voice-mail messages in their Office Outlook 2007 inboxes. When they are not at their desks, they can access messages through Microsoft Office Outlook Voice Access or Office Outlook Web Access, or by using the Microsoft ActiveSync® technology on their smartphones.

The Microsoft solution integrates with the Mitel and Cisco PBX systems, and employees use Jabra A330 USB Bluetooth adapters with Jabra BT5020 Bluetooth headsets for voice communications.

CTS employees—and also some employees of the Central Bancompany banks—are using Office Communications Server 2007 to investigate new forms of collaboration, such as instant messaging and Web conferencing. DeClerk says, “We have several different management styles throughout the banks, and some banks have really embraced new communications options.”

CTS has been so pleased with the initiative that it asked us to return in April 2009 to help deploy Office Communications Server 2007 R2, which offers increased support for on-premises audio and Web conferencing. “We’re excited about what Office Communications Server 2007 R2 will give us from a conferencing standpoint,” says DeClerk. CTS will then work to expand the Microsoft unified communications solution to users throughout the holding company’s 13 member banks.

BENEFITS

Central Technology Services has used the new unified communications features to improve staff productivity. CTS has also set a foundation for future cost savings with the expansion of communication and collaboration options.

IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY

The Microsoft solution has increased productivity for CTS employees by helping them to know when colleagues are available, making it easy to reach employees wherever they are, and providing convenient access to voice and e-mail messages.

“For example, Office Communications Server 2007 presence integration for our technical area has greatly increased efficiency,” says Nanneman. “The ability to know who is online and available allows for easy access for questions.”

Nanneman adds, “We have no formalized statistics, but I would estimate that on average the Microsoft unified communications solution saves each employee on average 15 minutes per day.”

DYNAMIC PRESENCE FOR USERS

Thanks to the presence capabilities of Office Communications Server 2007, people with questions can look up technicians to discover the best immediate method for communications. “I can see if they’re at their desks, or if they’re in a meeting but might be available to chat,” says DeClerk. “This is far more efficient than sending an e-mail message to a group and hoping that one of them decides to reply.”

Because of the integration with other Microsoft products, it is also easy to know which technician to call. “We have shared document repositories in Office SharePoint Server 2007 for documents such as network diagrams,” says DeClerk. “With the presence features of Office Communications Server 2007, I can see who last modified a document and whether that person is available. I can even click the person’s name to send a message or make a phone call.”

IMPROVED ACCESS ACROSS LOCATIONS

“We have used Office Communications Server 2007 to provide portable voice communications across the organization’s locations,” says Nanneman. Employees who move between locations are able to use a single company phone extension as their primary method of contact. When someone calls the number, all of the employee’s end-points ring; the employee can answer on whichever device is most convenient. This simplifies the life of traveling employees, who now miss fewer calls.

The unified communications features also help employees who are trying to track down their traveling colleagues. “The integrated voice solution is great for getting that more urgent question answered quickly, especially in departments where staff is dispersed,” says DeClerk. “You don’t have to spend a significant amount of time searching, calling different numbers and locations trying to reach someone. Then, in addition to the presence information, the Microsoft unified communications solution provides communications options such as IM. The combination makes it a great tool for being able to reach people in real time.”

UNIFIED VOICE AND E-MAIL MESSAGING

Because CTS employees communicate primarily through e-mail, they have particularly appreciated having voice-mail messages and missed telephone calls display in their Office Outlook 2007 inboxes. “With the Microsoft unified communications solution, all of your messages are in a single place, and they’re accessible from any device anywhere—whether it’s on your computer using Office Outlook 2007, with a telephone using Office Outlook Voice Access, or on a smartphone using Microsoft Office Outlook Mobile,” says DeClerk.

“It was interesting to watch, as the project developed,” says Adkins, “how the users gravitated toward unified messaging. They loved having their messages in one place, so they could organize them and work through them in a methodical way. Leadership had been particularly interested in the presence features, but the users—as happens with many of our customers—found substantial additional benefits in the unified messaging.”

COST-EFFECTIVE FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE

CTS is excited about leading Central Bancompany affiliates into new eras of online collaboration. “Often with new a technology, we deploy it here at CTS first to get familiar with it and know how to support it,” says DeClerk. “We like what we’ve seen so far with Office Communications Server 2007 and Exchange Server 2007, and now we’re looking at rolling out voice integration to the entire holding company.”

The rollout will involve expanded capabilities—from the conferencing supported by Office Communications Server 2007 R2 to federation with trusted partners. Federation provided by Office Communications Server 2007 and the new release makes it possible for organizations to communicate in real time in an encrypted, authenticated, and managed environment.

Yet the CTS move into this new communications era does not require huge expenditures. Because Exchange Server 2007 and Office Communications Server 2007 integrate with existing telephony hardware, there was no need to replace the Mitel or Cisco PBX systems. “As we continue to roll out the Microsoft unified communications solution,” DeClerk says, “we can use software to replace some of our older hardware, which will mean a real cost savings.”

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.