Shulmans
convergence case study

ipcortex

Award winning commercial legal firm selects high availability ipcortex VoIP solution to deliver flexibility, functionality and resilience

Shulmans LLP

Shulmans is a award-winning Leeds based commercial law firm which was founded in 1981 and serves all sectors of the business world. The firm is driven to achieve the best possible results for its strong client base, using its depth, expertise and flexibility to provide clients with a reliable, cost-effective, partner-orientated service. As Chairman and founder Jeremy Shulman puts it, "Our clients deserve the best and that is what we always try to deliver. Anything less will simply not do."

Project overview

- **2 VoIPCortex Pro IP PBXs for high availability**
- **115 extension system**
- **ISDN connectivity with SIP trunk failover**
- **Fully-featured Polycom IP450 handsets**
- **Support for informal inbound call centre**

Key benefits

- **Simple management and administration**
- **Almost limitless choice of IP handsets**
- **Visual wallboard for informal call centre**
- **Call recording for legal compliance**
- **Fully-featured yet cost effective solution**

The requirement

Shulmans previous phone system supported a mix of analogue, digital and IP lines, and was not even using basic facilities like voicemail and caller display. The system also had numerous different handsets and was extremely unreliable, as IT Manager Ross MacIntyre explains:

Ross MacIntyre, IT Manager

"Every two or three weeks we'd have an issue that needed fixing, so it was a real pain. We were using a third party supplier for support, but even though we paid a maintenance fee they were always trying to sell us extra things to fix issues! Having all the different lines and handsets was also a concern, as every time someone moved we had to physically re-patch a phone in, so it was a bit of a nightmare. It was obvious that we needed to change as the functionality was severely lacking, and I knew from previous experience and from research that there was so much more we could get out of a new phone system."

The solution

A full RFP process was carried out, but Ross also spoke to contacts at Westcom Networks, which supplies Shulmans' firewall solution, who suggested that he consider including ipcortex in the process.

"We knew we wanted an IP system, but more than anything I just wanted to get rid of all the different cables, floor ports, patching and so on! I knew it was the way forward. We had a network infrastructure that could cope with it in place already, so it was a no-brainer really.

We chose the ipcortex solution because it gave us the most functionality for our budget. As a smaller SME, it didn't make economic sense to go out and buy proprietary technology but it did made sense to buy smart, open technology from a UK based company, that did pretty much everything that we wanted to do and a little bit more. And at the right price."

The new solution has 115 extensions and uses Polycom IP450 handsets with HD Voice. Most notably, it actually uses two VoIPCortex Pro IP PBXs which are set up in a high availability configuration.

Ross and the team started setting up the new handsets the week before the switch-over, as well as holding awareness sessions in the boardroom.

"People were using old system until 6pm on the Friday, then we swapped everything over at the weekend and when people came in on the Monday they were on the new system. It was great, it just worked and was completely seamless. The user base saw the leap forward we've made with all the new functionality and they were suitably impressed - there was certainly appetite for it within the business."

The value

Simple day to day management

The new system is far easier to manage than the previous and moves, adds and changes are extremely simple to implement. From Ross's perspective, the ability to select the handsets that suited the firm best from a very wide range was critical.

"Previously we had numerous different types of handset - which was very difficult for new starters, and for me in maintaining lots of sets of documentation. What we now have is just one set of documentation and one easy way for users to do things. The admin is much less painful than before and we spend far less time managing and updating the system, which makes the associated cost far lower as well."

Useful features and functionality

Even basic features like voicemail and audio conferencing were new to Shulmans, as was having handsets which can be operated using context sensitive screens - whereas before, they did not even have caller display. These types of features are making a huge difference to the business already, as is the inbuilt call recording functionality which is especially useful for a legal firm. Other features which are also adding value include the audio conferencing facility, and the ease with which things like call queues can be managed.

"The main thing that swung it for us was the amount of functionality that we got for the price," continues Ross. *"The call queuing, for example, was a really good one for us. We have an informal call centre environment which receives more than 500 calls a day, and the fact that we can see all of the call queues via the visual wallboard is extremely useful."*

High availability (HA)

With the old system being so unreliable, staff and customers had actually got used to the fact that the system went down regularly, but this was not a situation which could be allowed to continue, as Ross explains:

"If you're taking 500 calls a day in one of your departments, then that could be 500 people getting a negative impression if the system fails. Now, it would have been preferable for us to have HA no matter what the solution was, but it was a question

of economics. With ipcortex we were able to buy that resiliency for the same price as a standard solution might have cost from another supplier and that was a key part of our decision."

The ipcortex HA solution synchronises both units in a heartbeat mechanism to ensure that if one becomes unavailable, then there is another that can continue to allow users to make calls, view call logs and pick up voicemails and call recordings within seconds. The solution also includes resilience in terms of external connectivity, as it is connected via both ISDN30e and by SIP trunks. If an ISDN line goes down, the VoIPCortex PBX simply switches seamlessly to using the SIP trunks. Shulmans also have the option to move to a full SIP-based solution in the future.

"Because we'll have already been using SIP for failover," adds Ross, *"we will be able to complete the migration process when we know that our confidence and comfort levels are there, and it's a suitable time to move on to the next level."*

Customer service benefits

One of the key benefits for Shulmans' customers has been the improvement in the call centre functionality. The firm is governed by the Solicitors Regulatory Authority, and whilst there are no specific regulations for phone systems, the Authority operates what it calls 'outcomes focused regulation' and one of the outcomes which Shulmans has to achieve is 'a high level of client care'.

With the VoIPCortex IP PBX in place, inbound calls are now handled more efficiently and there is far more transparency around the performance of the people who are handling those calls, as Ross concludes:

"We get daily reports showing who is answering how many calls, what the average wait time is and so on. We work to SLAs for our clients, and we now have the intelligence to make sure we are keeping to these. Something as simple as the wallboard means that supervisors can look up and see if there all calls queuing and yet people available. It's that simple. The new system makes it better for customers as we are able to answer more calls and deal with people's enquiries more quickly.

We've been really pleased with the whole experience, and the 'hand holding' and attention we got from ipcortex, and from Westcom, was first rate!"

About Westcom Networks

Westcom Networks was founded in 2002 with the vision of providing simple and effective networking solutions for clients. Based in Leeds, Wiltshire and Bristol, they provide extensive, pragmatic and cost-effective network solutions for clients nationwide.

For further information about Westcom Networks, please visit www.westcomnetworks.co.uk