

A Case of Night and Day

Coldwell Banker Meadow Realty Goes Hosted

Darkness Falls

The more a communications system becomes a small business' lifeline, the faster the business tends to realize it is time to look for a new system. When business owners start saying things about their existing systems, like, "I'm just not happy with it," it's inevitably time to make a change.

That was just what Mike Alamia, broker owner of Coldwell Banker Meadow Realty in East Meadow, NY, thought about his old phone system. In fact, he had been through several different household name phone systems, and they simply were enabling effective communications for his 12-person real estate office. He needed greater functionality and reliability, so that he and his team could focus on selling homes, not the phone system.

"I needed more on-hold and jump lines," explained Alamia. "I didn't want anyone to ever get a busy signal when they call the office."

Daybreak: Hosted VoIP Shines Bright

Alamia proceeded to "call everybody under the sun," in search of new equipment, with little luck. His luck changed, however, when his Broadview Networks' local sales representative dropped by for a routine visit (the office was using Broadview for its Internet service). Upon hearing Alamia's concerns, the rep proceeded to introduce Mike to Broadview's hosted service, which is powered by Ottawa, Canada-based Natural Convergence's silhouette platform.

silhouette provides VoIP capabilities to end customers with no on-premises equipment to install, other than a router, an Ethernet switch (both of which are most likely in place for the LAN and Internet connection anyway), and IP endpoints. Natural Convergence focuses its solution to meet the needs of small businesses with between four and fifty seats.

Upon signing up with Broadview, the real estate company purchased a number of Mitel IP phones, which are certified for

use with the silhouette platform. Alamia pointed out that he had the option of leasing or buying, but that the purchase price is low enough that, unless you are extremely tight on cash, it makes sense to buy, especially since there is often used equipment available for about \$100 per phone.

"I would have surpassed the purchase price in about 10 months," commented Alamia.

Silhouette Casts a Big Shadow

So, now that he has been on the silhouette platform for about a year, he is convinced he made a decision that has had a tremendous positive impact on his business. He has six lines, plus a fax line (which is imperative in the real estate business), and another six jump lines - all for a very low initial investment. The company is truly pleased with how the system has performed: "It's got all the bells and whistles. It's incredible, truly," said Alamia.

With the new system, Meadow Realty has added call control flexibility. The phones can ring at one desk, at all the desks, or some combination of the two; on-hold messages can be easily swapped out; the company even emailed a personalized message that was immediately added to the system.

According to Alamia, the call quality, compared to his old system, is like the difference between night and day. With the old system, he claims he had trouble hearing clients, and they had trouble hearing him. Now, he says, "the call quality is remarkable. I no longer have people continually asking, 'What?'"

In addition, with realtors being frequently out of the main office, the call for-

warding features now available to them are a tremendous productivity enhancer, since they are always accessible at their office number. Importantly, since there is no on-site IT specialist, Alamia says its good that the features are extremely easy to use.

"They are a joke - if I can do it, anybody can," he said. "In fact, I wouldn't know how to make it any easier."

What's more, there is nothing for Meadow Realty to maintain. There is a support system in place, with someone always available, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which is crucial for a seven day a week business.

"I simply pick up the phone and, regardless of what it is, it gets taken care of," said Alamia.

In fact, outside of buying the phones, the only thing the firm had to do was bring in a T1 line, which Alamia says he wanted to do anyway, simply to be able to keep up with technology - which he has also now done by implementing a hosted VoIP system. Is he happy with his decision?

"I would recommend the system to a family member," he boasts. "Everything is great about it, including the rates. In fact, they were able to lower my monthly expense by about \$400."

As it turns out, that fateful day, a little more than a year ago, when his local sales rep stepped in at just the right time, turned out to be a business changing experience for Mike Alamia and his small real estate office. **IT**

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