

Retail Cloud Telephony

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Summary


Traditionally, retailers have invested in data technologies and applications at the store level to enhance the overall customer service experience and workforce productivity. The evolution of the point of sale (POS) into a PC-based multi-tasking device was the first noticeable development. This new generation of devices incorporated sales data, merchandise data, credit card authorization, and other data collection capabilities into a single, manageable information resource.

With the advent of the Wide Area Network (WAN), companies stopped using dial up and fax as a means of transmitting inventory tracking and sales data to the corporate data center. This resulted in a greater investment for retailers on the 'data' side of the business at both the store and at the company headquarters, ignoring the Private Branch Exchange (PBX) as a viable way of reducing operational cost and improving customer service. (PBX is a telephone exchange dedicated to serving a specific business, rather than a common carrier providing service for the general public.)

Today, many retailers are facing rising costs and lower profit margins. Organizations strive to save money while enhancing service levels, or at the very least, maintaining a consistent level of service to the stores. But because of retailers' focus on the "data" trend, many have PBXs that are outdated and no longer supported, or are very expensive to support and impossible to maintain.

The introduction of a Centralized Hosted IP Telephony (Cloud Telephony) can help these retailers reduce overall telecommunication costs and bring benefits to the quality of customer service by utilizing data WAN technologies and existing data infrastructures.

The Retail Cloud Telephony solution simplifies management, reduces voice and data-related costs and provides more information on local operations directly to centralized IT departments.



This paper will examine the benefits and challenges presented to retailers who are considering the incorporation of Retail Cloud Telephony into their organizations, as well as offer cost-saving solutions.

Retail Cloud Telephony

Benefits

The intent behind IP Telephony has grown in a different direction than initially expected. Originally, organizations believed that IP Telephony would extend application functionality between data and telephone systems. In fact, IP Telephony has satisfied that objective, with a wide range of software vendors who are driving new applications into the convergence of data and telephony.

Return on Investment models for IP Telephony were initially only based upon application integration as a platform for productivity benefits, but with data centers actually becoming the centralized PBX, there is no large capital investment for a full on-premises telephony system. This has translated into serious cost savings.

Additionally, IP Telephony has made it possible for headquarters IT personnel to manage a store's communication equipment easily and remotely without having to dispatch "truck rolls" out to each location, further reducing the overall telecommunication and in-store costs.

Challenges

Because of the historic trends, retailers already have a large burden of too much technology taking up space in their stores. POS systems, network devices, kiosks, manager's workstations and others devices are continuing to add complexity to the store environment.

What's more, generic hosted telephony offerings in the marketplace don't work for many retailers who have unique business requirements in the store. Several application components such as overhead paging and call boxes are unique to the retail environment, while most generic hosted telephone systems are designed for office environments.

Finally, a move to a Cloud Telephony environment brings up an issue of redundancy. Utilizing the installed WAN topology is cost effective, but all computer environments are vulnerable to failure. Having the means to call 911 and provide services to the stores is critical when considering liability issues and liability insurance. In addition, if the WAN goes down, it can cause significant loss of business to a store, as customers will be unable to reach the retailer for information.

Solutions

An abundance of technology in a retail environment can prove burdensome. By moving PBX functionality from the store to a host, the retailer is able to remove application functionality from the store to the data center. This exciting change supports the decision to deploy IP Telephony systems in retail.

Moving to a network solutions provider who specializes in Retail Cloud Telephony offers a retailer the system that addresses their specific needs, including overhead paging capabilities and call boxes, as well as other items unique to the retail environment.

Lastly, backup systems are critical to a retailer whose business stands to suffer substantial setbacks in the event of a WAN failure. As such, most Cloud Telephony solutions connect to the host via a Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) network, leaving a retailer to focus on the core business at hand, rather than network connectivity.

The Specialists in Network Systems

For more than 25 years, Acuative has specialized in network systems. We have the dedicated skills and expertise in both the telephony industry and the retail industry to drive substantial cost savings. In fact, Acuative has the ability to provide a complete hosted telephony solution, or Cloud Telephony, to any retailer who strives to increase profits while decreasing expenditures.

Acuative helps retailers achieve this goal by delivering all the hardware for a hosted telephony solution including, telephone handsets, in-store routers, network switches, and data center servers. But, more importantly, Acuative has the capability to deliver the three critical keys necessary to unlock the potential of Cloud Telephony for the retailer—cost savings, unique retail functionality and redundancy.

Acuative's solution includes components from best-in-class manufacturers, leading software development vendors, and the integration skills of our own team of experts. Additionally, Acuative delivers support throughout the United States with our own national team of IT technicians.

At Acuative, we deliver a true Cloud Telephony solution. There are no hidden fees, so retailers only pay for the phones and service they utilize. As a result, our retail customers see substantial cost savings over the life of ownership and elimination of capital expenditures.

Conclusion

Retailers face some very industry-specific challenges when it comes to communication technology. Because their needs are unique, a one-size fits all solution that might work in an office environment, will never address their technology and telephony needs.

Additionally, an overabundance of technology at the store level coupled with the need for secure backup systems makes the incorporation of a Centralized Hosted IP Telephony system especially appealing.

By utilizing existing data WAN technologies and data infrastructures, retailers can realize significant cost reductions in voice and data-related technology. From simplified management processes to centralized IT departments for tracking sales and operations, Retail Cloud Telephony establishes itself as a sound technology solution for retailers

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