

CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY

WATKINS SYNDICATE SINGAPORE NOW COVERED BY CISCO UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CUSTOMER NAME

- Watkins Syndicate Singapore Pte Ltd

INDUSTRY

- Marine Insurance Solutions

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Communications infrastructure not scalable as the organisation grew in the last five years
- Need for advanced communication channels beyond those provided by traditional PABX telephone systems
- Requirement for a secure, fast data and voice connection to the London office to improve information flow

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Cisco Unified Communications, featuring Cisco CallManager Express

SOLUTION PARTNER

- Whizzwork Pte Ltd

BUSINESS VALUE

- Voice and data combined to one redundant, available network, saving on maintenance for separate voice network cabling.
- Advanced voice features such as call transfer, waiting, and voicemail now accessible via a simple, intuitive interface
- New phones can be added easily, and the voice/data network can now be integrated with London office via software configuration

The Singapore branch of this London-based marine insurance specialist enhances their quality of services by implementing a Cisco Systems Unified Communications solution, featuring Cisco IP Telephony solution, powered by Cisco Systems CallManager Express. With easy-to-use, advanced features, Watkins Syndicate Singapore can now operate much closer with their London counterparts.



Watkins Syndicate Singapore provides insurance solutions for Cargo, Hull, Energy, Marine Liability and Specie businesses for the whole of Asia. Operating within Lloyd’s of London (the world’s largest and oldest marine insurance market), Watkins Syndicate is part of the Munich Re Group and has been since 1997. Outside of London, Watkins Syndicate operates in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Dubai.

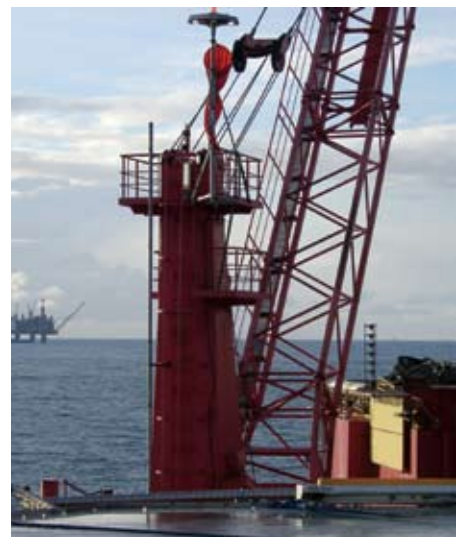
Because of its regional positioning as a major port, and its proximity to major oil and gas areas such as Malaysia and Indonesia and Australia, Watkins Syndicate Singapore is well positioned to tap into such businesses.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

Since the opening of Watkins Syndicate Singapore in 2000, the organisation has seen progressive and profitable growth. As a provider of specialised insurance

products, Watkins Syndicate Singapore competes with a handful of other players in the region.

“When we first started out in Singapore five years ago, it was purely a two-person team. Our IT solutions had to be simple and quick. As the company grew, our communications and IT infrastructure had to expand accordingly with our increasing needs,” said James Flude, Energy Underwriter and IT Manager, Watkins Syndicate Singapore.



“IT plays an important support function. It allows us to increase our service levels to policy holders, and gives us the ability go digital with documentation and policy creation, streamlining the entire process,” he added.

However, as the group grew from two to eight, a robust communications infrastructure was necessary to keep up with the growth, and ensure that scaling up would cause minimal disruption to the business. More importantly, it was necessary to create a dependable channel of communication with the office in London. Real-time data access to information from London was already achieved via a Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection through the Internet. The next thing that was required was a voice infrastructure.

“Our current setup was a standard telephony system. It had no voicemail, no call transfer, no messages, and ran on a network of cables separate from the data network,” said James. To perform even minor configuration changes, users had to punch in a complex series of numerical codes. “It wasn’t very scalable. The moment we tried to add new phones, we had to use outsourced telephony support to perform even the most simple of changes. The whole thing was just too hard to support without dedicated technical staff,” he added.

“What we needed was an advanced telephony system with features that would allow us to improve our quality of services to our customers. At the same time, it needed to be able to expand as more people came on board and give us the ability to perform minor configuration changes ourselves, with minimal downtime. Lastly, it needed to be a telephony system that we could link with the existing Cisco setup in London,” said James.

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- James Flude, Energy Underwriter and IT Manager, Watkins Syndicate Singapore

NETWORK SOLUTION

Based on the recommendation from the London office, Watkins Syndicate decided to implement a Cisco Systems Unified Communications solution. “The decision to go with Cisco fulfilled two important criteria; the first was that the London office was already running on Cisco technology. This would avoid any difficulties in integration later on,” said James.

“Secondly, we were quite confident in the quality, technical capabilities, and the level of support that Cisco could provide. Cisco’s vision and product roadmap extended toward a more complete solution of continuous optimisation and development of services, rather than just proving hardware and setting it up,” he added.

Based on this requirement, systems integrator Whizzwork Pte Ltd was tasked to design and implement the solution. As a Cisco Systems Specialised Partner (VPN/Security & IP Communications), Whizzwork has had experience implementing such projects for organizations of similar size.

“People sometimes think that only large enterprises can justify deploying a Cisco IP-based network. The truth is, this solution

works just as well for smaller sized organizations. The best part is, once in place, it becomes much easier to expand in size,” said Mike Tan, Associate Director of Technology Solutions, Whizz-Work Pte Ltd.

Watkins Syndicate decided to deploy Cisco CallManager Express, the call processing software component for IP Telephony. Compared to Cisco CallManager, Cisco CallManager Express is targeted specially for the small office, facilitating the deployment of a cost-effective and highly reliable unified communications solution.

To provide the voice infrastructure, Whizzwork designed a network utilizing two Cisco Catalyst 3560



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Series Switches. Via these switches, and the Cisco CallManager Express software, Watkins Syndicate can effectively converge the voice and data network into one. In this design, if a problem were to occur with one of the switches, the other could take over without disruption, providing the necessary network redundancy.

In this implementation, a four-man team from Whizzwork designed and put the solution in place in just two weeks in November 2005. In all, 13 Cisco IP Phones were deployed, 12 of those being Cisco 7940 Series IP Phones, and one Cisco 7960 Series IP Phone with a CP-7914 add-on module, used for the boardroom. Additionally, a Cisco IP Conference Station 7936 provided conference facilities.

BUSINESS VALUE

“The new Cisco IP phones have been well received by our staff,” said James. “They look good, feel sturdy, and give us a number of features that make communication with our staff - and our customers - a lot easier,” said James.

Among the welcome features is the ability to access voicemail, call history, and call forwarding. Previously, such features were either not available or only accessible by entering a series of complicated numerical codes. Now, these features are available via the large LCD screen and softkeys. Voice conferencing is now simple to initiate as well. All callers simply have to dial a common number, and enter the pre-assigned conference ID.

Users can also personalise, and make configuration settings to their phones via the LCD screen. For instance, ringtones can be assigned to caller groups, and extensions can be added or removed when needed. Additionally, the IP network allows users to simply unplug their phones, move to another desk, and plug the phones back in, without requiring an administrator to setup the phone port beforehand.

“The unified IP network brings us one step closer to our London office. At the moment, data from London is accessed via VPN. However, even though voice calls go through the IP network in Singapore, we haven’t fully integrated it with the London net-

work, so all calls to London are made over trunk IDD for the moment. Once that converted to the IP network in the next few weeks, we'll be able to make IDD calls over IP (VPN via Internet) between Singapore and London, hence achieving toll-bypass and bring down IDD cost," said James.

The new Cisco IP network gives Watkins Syndicate a robust infrastructure that will grow according to their needs. They can easily plug in new phones when required, optimize network traffic to maintain a high quality of service and voice fidelity, detect and respond quickly to any points of failure. Using the Cisco CallManager Express software, they can also create virtual groupings of phones or users without making any physical changes.

"I would say that Whizzwork have been very proactive in this project. They've responded to our needs with a Cisco solution that fits, and one that sets the foundation for future growth," said James.

NEXT STEPS

Now that the Singapore office network is on its way to being able to operate seamlessly with London, similar solutions are being explored for their other branches in Hong Kong and Dubai. "Singapore will be the pilot for rolling out similar Cisco implementations in our other offices in Hong Kong and Dubai. So far, the results have been very promising, and our counterparts in London are keen to take it further," said James.

Once connected to the London office network, Singapore users can access the corporate directory on their phones. They will also be able to add various information services to the phones, such as weather, stocks, or any Web-based information using extensible markup language (XML) to provide a portal to an ever growing world of information. "There are a host of things that we can add to our new network," he added.

"In fact, we've been so pleased with the level of service that Whizzwork has provided, we've decided to retain them for further projects involving our Cisco network infrastructure," concluded James.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Cisco Unified Communications, go to: www.cisco.com/go/unified

To find out more about Whizzwork, go to: www.whizzwork.com.sg

To find out more about Watkins Syndicate, go to: www.watkins-syndicate.co.uk



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