

Reseller Gets Competitive Edge with Unified Communications



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MSN Communications

- Cisco Gold Certified Partner
- Cisco Master Unified Communications Specialist
- Denver, Colorado
- Two additional offices in Phoenix, Arizona and Los Angeles, California

CHALLENGE

- Give account managers and engineers deeper knowledge of technologies
- Improve internal communications
- Answer impressive competitive product demo

SOLUTION

- Deploy Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners to enable employees to experience capabilities first-hand
- Create real-world, living demonstration that can be shown at customer sites
- Use single-number reach to improve communications

RESULTS

- Engineers gain hands-on experience with products before engaging with customers
- UC sales grew 10 percent, and data center sales grew 23 percent in down market
- Won two engagements in four months that might have otherwise been lost to competitors

Hands-on experience with unified communications helps MSN Communications win business.

Challenge

MSN Communications was founded in 1993 as Mountain States Networking by Doug Schuck, a former corporate IT executive who had a vision of supplying the kind of superior, flexible customer service large enterprises were not receiving from the service arms of their communications partners. Today the company has approximately 80 associates across its main office in Denver and two satellite locations in Phoenix and Los Angeles. MSN focuses on three key areas: borderless networking, data center and virtualization; and unified communications/collaboration. The company is a Cisco® Gold Certified and Master UC (unified communications) Specialist partner with customers throughout the Rocky Mountain region.

One of the guiding principles of MSN is being adaptable and flexible to address its enterprise customers' needs as they arise. Making that principle a reality, though, requires a level of knowledge about the nuances of the products they sell and the way they work together that cannot be found in a PowerPoint deck, a data sheet, or training class. It can only be learned through hands-on experience.

“The Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners concept works well for a company like ours that is heavily involved in integration,” says Clifton Wiser, a solution manager at MSN. “We like to roll up our sleeves, try

the various technologies, and understand how they work together before recommending them to our customers. When we were presented with the Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners program, giving us the ability to purchase and try all of these technologies, there was no way we were going to pass on that opportunity.”

Although gaining hands-on experience was the primary factor in purchasing Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners, improving internal communications was a secondary factor. The offices in Phoenix and Los Angeles have very limited

infrastructure to begin with, and even if that was not the case, much of the sales and engineering staff spends most of their time out of the office at customer sites. Prior to Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners, it was difficult to know where MSN's experts were at any given time as well as whether they were online and available. Even if they were available, actually reaching them via normal phone and email applications often proved daunting.

A more specific challenge revolved around a competitive unified communications vendor that had armed its resellers with a very impressive demonstration to show to prospects. MSN was having difficulty conveying the Cisco message with equal impact, and in fact lost several sales opportunities in 2009. The company needed to answer this demonstration in a way that would leave prospects feeling that Cisco and MSN had the most to offer them in a unified communications deployment.

Solution

After making the purchase, MSN immediately began using various products in Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners to learn what impact they could have on an organization's business. The presence platform was the quickest and easiest win internally, according to Wisner.

"Having access to real-time, phone-based presence information changed the sales dynamic for us," he says. "It gave account managers the ability to reach out directly to our inside sales organization, other account managers, and our pre-sales engineering group, instead of relying on remote access. Being able to exchange information as easily as if they were all sitting in the Denver office helped them respond more rapidly to opportunities as they came up. It had a similar effect on our sales engineers who are at customer sites. It really let us live up to the idea that 'work is something you do, not somewhere you go.'"

The other immediate win from the customers' point of view was single-number reach, which MSN now has for everyone in the organization. When customers call one of MSN's engineers, they dial their usual extension and get connected right away, even if the engineer is hundreds of miles away from the office.

"We've received several comments from customers to the effect of 'you guys always seem to be working; I can never dial into your office and catch you off,'" Wisner says. "It's eliminated any impression that people are working from home. It's truly a seamless opportunity."

Since that time, MSN has deployed other technologies included in Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners, including Cisco Unified Communications Manager, Unity® Connection, and Unified MeetingPlace®. The company plans to continue adding to the mix, particularly because it involves no additional capital expense.

"Having access to real-time, phone-based presence information changed the sales dynamic for us. It really let us live up to the idea that 'work is something you do, not somewhere you go.'"

— Clifton Wisner, Solution Manager, MSN Communications

Results

Both the sales and engineering staffs have had the way they work directly and positively affected by MSN's adoption of Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners. Previously when a new technology was introduced, the engineers would have received training on it. But their first practical experience would have been in the field, at a customer site. Now, thanks to the flexibility the program offers, MSN's engineers can try different applications before engaging with customers, and more importantly, understand how the various applications integrate with one another. It has made them much more efficient and knowledgeable.

The difference on the sales side is just as great. “There is a marked improvement among our salespeople in understanding how UC can change the way a company communicates and collaborates, which really affects nearly every aspect of the business,” says Wiser. “Having real-time visibility into other peoples’ calendars, presence, availability to chat, and so forth has helped make that conversation about transforming the business much more relevant. It’s allowing our account managers to speak from direct experience rather than having to rely solely on the marketing collateral.”

Moving Step-By-Step

Still, for a customer that has been using a traditional private branch exchange (PBX) phone system with voicemail, a standard email application, and perhaps a little bit of chat, moving into unified communications can be more than a little intimidating. Here again is where the experience gained through its own deployment of Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners helps MSN sell to its customers.

“One thing we’re able to show customers right away is how the flexibility of the Cisco Unified Workspace Licensing allows us to take a step-by-step approach to moving customers towards true collaboration,” Wiser says. “We’re able to build a road map that allows them to evolve their way of communicating at a pace they can handle. Although they may be excited by the possibilities, it can be very disruptive to the customers’ users to try to implement too much too soon. With Cisco Unified Workspace Licensing, we can slowly swing the pendulum from a traditional layer to something more adept at the speed at which they can absorb change. As a result, we can sell larger deployments than if we tried to do everything at once.”

Winning Business

The real-world, hands-on experience MSN has gained through Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners has had a direct effect on its business success since the beginning of 2010. In 2009, MSN found itself in several competitive bidding situations against resellers of a unified communications line that is competitive to Cisco. The other company had a very impressive demonstration of its systems’ capabilities that was providing a “wow” factor to their resellers’ sales presentations.

“It was very clear, it explained the products well, and it just flat-out looked good,” Wiser says. “We lost some bids as a result. But once we were able to go into a prospect’s office and demonstrate right then and there the impact that Cisco’s UC platform is having on our business, and speak to how we use it day-to-day, the advantage swung our way. What we were showing was real, not just a canned demo or something we picked up off a slide somewhere, and it looked like we understood the platform better. It’s been the deciding factor in winning some deals over the past few months.”

Although video endpoints included in Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners is not widely deployed throughout the organization, MSN also has a few users taking advantage of that feature. Demonstrating that capability in a real-time environment is helping prospects get excited as well.

“What we were showing was real, not just a canned demo or something we picked up off a slide somewhere, and it looked like we understood the platform better. It’s been the deciding factor in winning some deals over the past few months.”

— Clifton Wiser, Solution Manager, MSN Communications

PRODUCT LIST

Network Systems

- Cisco Catalyst 4500 Series Switch
- Cisco 2821 Integrated Services Router
- Cisco Wireless Access Points
- Cisco ASA 5510 Series Adaptive Security Appliance with VPN

Unified Communications

- Cisco CallManager version 7
- Cisco Unified IP Phones 7941
- Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners, including:
 - Cisco Unity® Unified Messaging
 - Cisco Unified MeetingPlace®
 - Cisco Unified Mobility
 - Cisco Unified Personal Communicator
 - Cisco Unified Contact Center Express
- Cisco Agent Desktop
- Cisco Unified Attendant Console
- Cisco WebEx™ Meeting Center

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Communication, visit:

www.cisco.com/go/unifiedcommunications

To find out more about Cisco Unified Workspace for Partners, visit:

www.cisco.com/web/partners/sell/promotions/unified_workspace.html

To find out more about MSN Communications, visit: www.msncomm.com

To join conversations and share best practices about collaboration, visit:

www.cisco.com/go/joinconversation



Americas Headquarters
Cisco Systems, Inc.
San Jose, CA

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems (USA) Pte. Ltd.
Singapore

Europe Headquarters
Cisco Systems International BV
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Cisco has more than 200 offices worldwide. Addresses, phone numbers, and fax numbers are listed on the Cisco Website at www.cisco.com/go/offices.

© 2010 Cisco and the Cisco Logo are trademarks of Cisco Systems, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the U.S. and other countries. A listing of Cisco's trademarks can be found at www.cisco.com/go/trademarks. Third party trademarks mentioned are the property of their respective owners. The use of the word partner does not imply a partnership relationship between Cisco and any other company. (1005R)