AVAYA

Engage The Power of We™

HOW EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS DELIVERS REAL RESULTS FOR YOUR SMALL BUSINESS

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Introduction

Today's communications systems are designed with capabilities small businesses can use to attract more customers, expand operations, streamline routine customer transactions and much more. This whitepaper looks at four key ways any growing business can benefit from IP-based communications solutions, including taking advantage of built-in cost savings.

IP-based Communications Solutions

When most small businesses think about acquiring a new communications system, they usually consider factors such as: Does the system have the features that we need? Is it reliable? Is it the right size? Can it grow as we grow? Will it fit within our budget?

All of these questions are important, but unfortunately the most important question is often overlooked: How will the communications system deliver real results for our business?

Most small or medium businesses don't think of their business communications as something that can help attract new customers, increase revenues, develop more repeat business, keep overhead in check—all of the ways that a business grows. But, in fact, that's exactly what today's new office communications system can help you accomplish.

Why? What is it about today's new communications systems that makes them suited to the task of business development? In a nutshell, it's the technology: communications systems today are based on the Internet Protocol (IP). These new communications systems are often referred to as VoIP or Voice over IP systems. The voice signals are digitized and transported as packets, in the same way e-mails and data files are transmitted over the Internet.

What does that mean in terms of practical, every day business realities?

The right communications system can take your existing strengths and transform how you deliver them - helping your business operate more efficiently, reduce expenses, be more responsive to customers and colleagues, and manage the peaks and valleys of business expansion and contraction.

It means that today's communications systems are really more like computers than traditional communications systems. They are more versatile, able to accept applications, ready to become integrated into everyday business operations, becoming a "go-to" resource for:

- Managing and administering all your business communications—not just voice, but also video, e-mail and instant messaging (IM)

- Communication-enabling every day sales and service functions

- Simplifying and speeding office or mobile interactions among employees, partners, customers, etc.

- Reducing the cost of existing expenses

- Lowering the risk of down time or lost productivity

No communications system will ever replace all the other important ingredients needed for business success. You still need to offer a great product or service, price it right, market it effectively and maintain quality and competitive differentiation.

What the right communications system can do is take your existing strengths and transform how you deliver them—by helping make your business operate more efficiently, by reducing expenses, by enabling your people to be more responsive to customers and each other, and by giving you an added measure of flexibility in managing the peaks and valleys of business expansion and contraction.

Today, there are businesses that are benefiting from their IP based systems in exactly these ways. This white paper will look at four key ways you can use communications to deliver real results for your small business and cite some actual examples of businesses just like yours that are doing it today.

1. Enabling Faster Responsiveness

In the old days, people always worked in an office. They might "take work home" and even take calls at home, but this was all ancillary to the work done at the office. Just about everyone knows that this is not the case anymore. People today can work not only from their primary office, but also from home offices, colleagues' offices, the offices of customers and partners, coffee shops, hotel rooms, airport terminals—just about anywhere. They stay connected using mobile devices: laptops, smart phones or tablets.

Being connected in so many different ways and being able to work in so many different locations is a great convenience, but it also creates challenges. Knowing how to best reach someone has become more complex. How often do people ask

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Industry: Television and Video Production

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Location: New York City

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Customers: 150

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Employees: 78

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Communications: Avaya IP Office

"What's the best number to use to reach you?" or "Why didn't you text me?"

The fact is, simply being able to connect anytime, anywhere is no longer enough. Businesses that want to truly leverage the power of remote workforces, dispersed operations, teleworking, etc. need solutions that enable them to proactively manage and integrate today's anytime, anywhere communications capabilities. That's exactly what today's IP-based communications systems are designed to do. And they are doing it in a way that can deliver real, business-building benefits.

Take the case of Leftfield Pictures, a television production firm in New York City. Staying competitive in the fast-paced New York production world requires top-notch creativity that can be produced on time and on budget. Leftfield is unquestionably creative; it has a credit list of top-rated shows on a range of cable networks. When Leftfield looked for ways to become more efficient, it quickly focused on communications. The firm realized that its existing communications system was actually handling less and less of the firm's overall communications and not doing a particularly good job of it.

- There was no Caller ID or easy way for callers to get directly to a Leftfield staff person... this caused delay and missed calls.
- Leftfield producers on location, who wanted to collaborate effectively with their colleagues back in the edit room, were constantly juggling their mobiles, the office communications system, e-mail and IM—with no easy linkage between any of them.
- There was no way to tell who was calling or who was available to talk so that information had to be relayed and referenced manually.
- To keep in touch with productions in progress throughout the country, the company lives on conference calls, but had to pay an outside company to host them. This resulted in high costs.
- Simply answering and transferring calls kept one person busy all day and added a buffer to connecting with "the right person".

Even though its old communications system was still working, Leftfield decided to make the move to IP-based communications, using an Avaya IP Office solution. The difference has been dramatic.

The result for Leftfield Pictures: their communications is now as top notch as their creativity—supporting the business, instead of getting in the way.

- Now, all Leftfield staff members have their own extension and can be easily reached through the company directory.

- Staff can see at a glance who is available and how best to reach them—e-mail, mobile, chat, etc.

- When a call comes in, staff can have their office and mobile communications ring simultaneously, so they don't miss a call simply by being away from their desk. If the call is not picked up, the voice mail gets digitized and sent as an attachment to an e-mail to be picked up anywhere.

- Conference calls are now hosted on IP Office—eliminating the need for outside conferencing services.

Leftfield estimates that Avaya IP Office has cut communications management time in half and made the company easier to do business with, which is another way to drive real results for your business that we will look at next.

2. How easy are you to do business with?

How easy do you make it for customers to choose and do business with your company? Thinking about it quickly, you might answer "We're a small company, we can respond to any situation quickly." In reality, however, it's the very rare company that can make that claim. Nearly every company has procedures and processes that must be followed when taking on a new customer, a new job, making a bid or signing a contract.

When a call comes in, it's not uncommon for even the most customer-focused company to throw up roadblocks. How often do you find someone in your company saying: "Our person who handles that kind of project isn't here right now." or "The person assigned to your account will be in the office later today."

During peak buying seasons, or when a call comes in outside of regular business hours, or if the customer request is not quite routine, these delays tend to increase. Even a company with generally fast response times can find them slowing to a painful crawl. In today's world, when the competition is a click away, these delays invite the prospect to move on and find a company more responsive.

This was exactly the situation at Broken Arrow Wear, an online retailer of custom clothing (custom printed designs on garments) whose revenue is heavily dependent on phone-based orders. Broken Arrow became increasingly concerned that its communications system was hurting business. Some of the tell-tale clues were:

- The phone-time devoted to new sales vs. existing orders had dramatically shifted to the latter.

- Sales reps were devoting more and more time routing calls to the appropriate contact, taking time away from answering sales calls.

- The number of complaints about messages not making it to intended representatives, or calls being unreturned, had also risen.

Upon investigation, the source of the problem was uncovered. Broken Arrow had grown both in sales and number of locations, but the communications system hadn't kept up. Calls were misdirected, requiring staff to transfer calls between departments. There was no easy way to route a call to a specific Broken Arrow sales representative, frustrating customers who wanted to speak with their designated representative and not a new person each time.

The solution: Broken Arrow decided to take advantage of the intelligent call routing capabilities in an Avaya IP Office solution.

With Avaya IP Office, customers now call one number and are routed to the appropriate department or person. Sales people, for instance, don't get calls that were meant for artists or billing. Customer complaints about unreturned calls due to lost or delayed messages largely went away. Also, the system makes it easy to support telecommuting and work-at-home capabilities, so Broken Arrow Wear is able to hire talent from anywhere to help them more effectively handle the growing influx of orders, and ensure they are prepared for the high volume of customer inquiries during the summer.

Broken Arrow's implementation of Avaya IP Office demonstrates a key capability of the new IP-based systems: intelligent routing that simplifies and streamlines the customer engagement process in ways that can help you grow your business.

- Call routing capabilities that minimize hold times, quickly delivering customer calls even during peak periods.

- Programming your system to instantly recognize repeat customers: providing the personal touch that drives customer loyalty.

- Providing automated, self-service options such as access information, directions and service status, speeding response for customers and freeing up staff to answer more complex inquiries.

- Customize your attendant solution to handle calls in different ways at different times. Equip your automated attendant with a directory, making it easy for callers to dial by name.

- Taking advantage of features such as "call parking" that enables staff to deliver calls directly to the individual who can best serve a particular customer, but make sure that the call is picked up and handled promptly.

- Point-and-click call management that makes it easy to handle calls via an on-screen interface with a script to answer general questions correctly and prioritize incoming calls.

By increasing the chance of a smooth, efficient, responsive customer interaction, you enhance the image of your company in ways that can lead to measureable business improvement.

This also establishes a clear competitive differentiator, demonstrating that you are a company that is committed to delivering a quality customer experience. That's a third key way today's IP communications solutions can help build business.

3. Creating the Right Customer Experience

Customer service is critical to any enterprise today. It's the key to competitive differentiation, customer retention and overall brand awareness. This is particularly true in the wake of the dramatic economic downturn that took hold in 2008. Surveys of small businesses show that SMEs know how important good word of mouth is and that service is the critical factor for recommending a business.

AmeriMerchant, a growing financial services company, knows the importance of customer service first hand. AmeriMerchant provides merchant account funding, enabling small businesses to borrow against future credit card receipts. It's a solution for businesses that have good cash flow through credit cards (i.e., restaurants) but need an infusion of working capital and may not be able to obtain a conventional business loan. It's a very competitive industry. AmeriMerchant knows that keeping customers on hold for just a few extra seconds can lead them to give up and move on to a competitor. The best growth strategy for AmeriMerchant is to get one of its sales representatives connected to an incoming caller as quickly as possible.

Taking advantage of one of the most powerful capabilities in today's IP-based communications solutions, AmeriMerchant organized its sales team into a formal contact center. Large banks, brokerage firms, major credit card processors and other companies have long enjoyed the ability to set up formal contact centers with agents dedicated to handling calls. Today, a solution such as Avaya IP Office enables a smaller company such as AmeriMerchant to do the same thing.

AMERIMERCHANT

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Industry: Financial Services

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Location: New York City

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Employees: 8

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Communications: Avaya IP Office

When a call comes in, AmeriMerchant is committed to engaging a customer within seven seconds. AmeriMerchant offers a range of financial services and uses different 800 numbers. With the Avaya IP Office solution, the sales representative instantly knows what the caller is interested in. If it's an existing customer, the Avaya solution automatically triggers the retrieval of the customer's record from AmeriMerchant's CRM solution (Salesforce.com.) The days of having callers repeat basic identifying information are over at AmeriMerchant.

Calls to specific AmeriMerchant sales reps can always get through. If the sales rep has stepped away, the call can automatically ring on a mobile. The system is also set up so that voice mail messages are automatically forwarded as an attachment to the sales rep's smartphone. If a call center is at capacity, calls are automatically forwarded to another AmeriMerchant location.

Because AmeriMerchant's business is very fax oriented—new agreements have to be faxed and approved before financing can take place—the ability of the Avaya IP solution to handle voice, fax, e-mail, IM and more makes it easy for new financing agreements to be approved quickly.

The power of the contact center capabilities goes beyond call routing—with today's communications systems the contact center becomes a well defined business unit with specialized software and reporting capabilities to fine-tune performance. AmeriMerchant is able to carefully evaluate agent workloads and consequently put more focus into outbound calling efforts.

AmeriMerchant also takes advantage of another key capability of today's IP-based solutions: call recording. This is a critical way that customer-focused organizations can use their communications system to keep tabs on quality, identifying instances of inaccurate or poorly conveyed information that can negatively impact customer experience. Gaining knowledge through call recording is vital for training purposes.

Founded in 2002, AmeriMerchant's goal is to be a one-stop resource for all kinds of financial services for small businesses. Its communications system will keep supporting the company as it adds new services.

That gives AmeriMerchant a seamless path for business growth—a fourth key way that today's IP-based communications solutions make it easier to keep building a business.
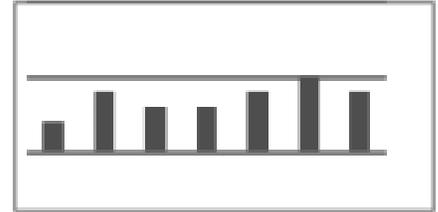
4. Efficiently Managing Business Growth

Ideally, every business likes to see a growth chart that shows steady, well timed business expansion:
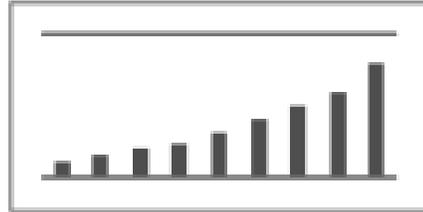
Something like this

But what's more likely is something like this

The reality in business is that a "steps and ladders" growth pattern is more typical than simple, steady upward growth. That's what can make managing a small business such a high wire act: projecting incoming business and matching it with cash flow and overhead.

Providing your business with an extra measure of flexibility to manage inevitable fluctuations in business growth is a critical way today's IP communications systems deliver a compelling value proposition for small businesses.

PetWow, a veterinary hospital with a growing clinical practice and dog grooming service in the greater Cincinnati area, is an example of a company that is using IP-based communications, specifically the Avaya IP Office solution, to carefully manage its growth and expand its practice in a very innovative way.

While most pets are brought to the main clinic, PetWow has launched a mobile service using specially-equipped vans to make house calls. This enables the practice to expand its market reach (without investing in costly new facilities) while offering a desirable perk to customers. The vans are outfitted with examining tables, diagnostic devices, medicines and Avaya VPN remote desk phones to handle communications between the clinicians in the van and veterinarians back at the main office.

PetWow could have used cellular links—but the goal was not simply connectivity, it was to make the vans mobile extensions of the main office. This illustrates a key capability of the new communications: the ability not simply to route calls and messages but also to extend the full functionality of the office communications system to virtually any location served by an Internet connection, and any device (such as a mobile, an IP phone or a PC).

By using mobile broadband and the Avaya VPN remote telecommunications, the vans are just a 4-digit extension away. Clinicians can respond to voice calls and group pages, take part in conference calls, rely on speed dials, messaging etc. as if

they were in the office. The vans are, in effect, just another part of the office—they just happen to be on wheels.

PetWow also takes advantage of this capability to hire home-based workers: part-time receptionists, equipped with VPN communications, who are available to handle calls during peak periods. These home-based workers have full access to the network for transferring calls, forwarding messages and setting appointments. Now PetWow is able to effectively adapt its office support as its patient volume—for the hospital, the mobile clinic and the grooming service—expands and contracts.

ADDING UP THE COST SAVINGS

All of the companies described in this whitepaper selected the Avaya IP Office solution to meet a business challenge. In most cases, they had an existing communications system that was still doing the job they bought it for, it simply wasn't supporting their business strategy. In addition, the world around them had rapidly evolved and shifted expectations so they proactively sought a way to get their business aligned. But along the way, all of the companies described here also realized significant cost savings:

- Leftfield pictures estimates that cutting reception routing and handling time has **saved $50,000 a year**

- Broken Arrow Wear boosted customer satisfaction and employee productivity, helping to **generate a 15 percent increase in sales**

- For AmeriMerchant, the functionality of the Avaya IP Office system (such as better, faster sales coverage) instantly justified the investment; and by eliminating the need for separate fax lines and other services, the Avaya IP Office solution **paid for itself within a year**

- PetWow estimates that it would have needed to hire five to eight additional people to handle the increased volume of business, translating into an **annual savings of over $200,000 a year**

Other companies have also reported significant, hard dollar savings:

Bringing Communications In-house: Eliminating or reducing the expense of outsourced conferencing fees, teleworker costs (second line charges), real estate costs and legacy PBX maintenance costs.

Scalability and investment protection: Being able to keep growing (up to 1000 endpoints) with the same product; being able to keep existing wiring (if you choose to) and saving up to 60% of the new system price by working with a wide variety of phones that you may already have.

Reducing Calling costs: Connecting multiple sites to enable site-to-site calling in network; routing mobile communications and long-distance calls over existing broadband links.

Consolidating or re-deploy resources: Automating reception across sites, load balancing work loads or simple routing to prompts are a few ways that existing service expense can be re-deployed to more revenue driving roles.

Simple administration tools: Being able to easily do moves, adds or changes to your system without incurring extra technical expenses.

Why the Time is Now

In today's challenging economic environment, growing businesses to be able to take advantage of any window of opportunity to drive innovation and be ready to benefit from the return of favorable business conditions. An IP-based communications solution such as Avaya IP Office gives you the power and flexibility to do just that.

For some companies, there may be one specific advantage—for example, the ability to transform how they serve customers. For others, it may be the flexibility and empowerment that these new solutions provide to their people while mobile.

These capabilities can be part of the solution itself, but can also be provided by an ecosystem of independent companies who develop applications that customize a communications system for the needs of different kinds of companies and organizations, such as retailers, medical practices or law firms.

For every company, these solutions offer opportunities that can be implemented without causing disruption or discarding existing assets such as the desk phones you may now be using in your business. This makes the value of these solutions to your business more compelling than ever.

Visit **www.avaya.com/small** to see more customer stories.

About Avaya

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