

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview on behalf of Qwest

Aaron Johnson

Televerde

Telecom Manager

Last updated: 2009 May 29



Product(s): IPLD & Toll Free
Industry: Technology, Call Center

1. Business need

"My name is Aaron Johnson. I am the Senior Telephony Engineer at Televerde, which is a local IT marketing agency here in Arizona, and I manage all of the communications for a fairly decent-sized call center, about 350 to 500 agents depending on what we're running.

Some of the challenges we faced were we had a very complex infrastructure. We had a lot of equipment to handle a moderate-sized call volume, so our system complexity really didn't match what we needed, so we wanted something to consolidate [our system] that was really reliable and then also was very affordable.

Well, the complexities provide several different challenges. One is just being aware of all of your systems and all of the intricacies and how they all interact.

If you want to train new people on how to manage those systems, you have a lot of management time, a lot of lead time to get them up to speed.

Every single point in your system is going to be a source of failure, so if you can reduce your systems requirements by 75 percent like we did, that reduces your likelihood of downtime by 75 percent or even greater because you now have a much simpler environment.

We also had a completely voice over IP system in house that we were trying to interface with the traditional phone network.

Really, we would have preferred to be voice over IP from the user's headset all the way to the point where we handed it off to the phone service provider without any kind of media conversion or any sort of conversion in the process.

We just want to do voice over IP; we don't want to worry about TDM hardware, time-division multiplexing, T1s--stuff like that.

And then we were also paying a fairly substantial amount of money--T1 lines are much more expensive than your traditional Internet connection, so by replacing ten T1s with one Internet connection, we were able to save quite a bit of cost just in line cost, and then also reduce our permanent expense."

2. Evaluation & selection

"Our criteria was primarily quality was number one on our list. Price was probably second or third. We wanted something that was going to be high quality [first] that we had control of [second], and then probably third on our list was price.

We selected three different companies. One was a local-based company, one was Qwest, and one was another company that was nationwide.

And what we did was we combined all of the benefits of all three companies and then sat down--I sat down with our network engineer, our senior network engineer and our vice president of IT--and we kind of sat down and talked it all out.

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We knew it was going to involve networking, so we needed somebody from the networking side, and we just sat down and went over the pros and cons of each provider."

3. Why Qwest?

"The most significant reasons we chose Qwest were because we already had some substantial infrastructure with Qwest.

We have Qwest Metro [Optical] Ethernet. We already had Qwest Internet, so we knew that we already had experience with the Internet and good reliability there, and we knew that the IP path that the voice packets were going to take to get to Qwest were obviously going to be really short.

We're already on Qwest's network, so we don't have to worry about a problem with an Internet router in San Jose getting in the way with our voice communications going to our provider in Nevada. So that was really important.

One of the other reasons we chose Qwest was because of the quality. We knew that the voice quality was going to be far superior because of the short routes and the control that we had and Qwest had.

And then one of the other major reasons we chose Qwest was they allowed us to try it for free, so we had a chance to test it out and we were confident and assured that it was going to work, it was going to work well--and then not only that, it was not expensive."

4. Service activation

"The scope of the activation was fairly medium-sized. We have a call center with five locations, and we have main servers at two locations, so really it was pretty simple--just a matter of routing really.

Everything was already set up with Qwest, so to route all five call centers over to Qwest was really pretty seamless.

When we had decided to with Qwest, we chose to go with their voice over IP long distance, which is outbound calling, and also their toll-free voice over IP inbound service.

We did the voice over IP outbound service in December 2008 and that went really well. We had a two-week trial period before we moved all of our services over, so we had a chance to test it out, test the quality, make sure everything was working correctly.

And you know, it was just a simple switch of a button, click of a button, on our part to move it from our old providers to Qwest. It was very easy, very minimal setup on our part, and the actual transition was instantaneous without any problems."

5. Overview of solution

"To overview our Qwest services, we do about half a million minutes a month, and we do that at six locations, [our] corporate office and five call center locations. We do the Qwest outbound long distance along with some inbound toll-free service--so that really overviews kind of the Qwest voice services that we use.

Our call centers are located in a women's prison facility, so we are located across five yards at a women's prison, and then we use fiber connections to backhaul all of that to a single location that's at the prison facility, and then we use Qwest Metro Ethernet to put that all on a single network with our data facility and our corporate

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office.

And the interesting thing about that is there's obviously a lot of security that has to go up around the women's prison, and it can be a real pain to get anybody to come in there and do the install--and that was actually another really great thing about Qwest was they worked directly with the prison facility and with us to get all of the clearances--because there's background checks that had to happen and all of that stuff--so that they could actually come in and even do the install.

So even to get services installed was quite difficult and Qwest did it without any problem.

We also use Qwest's online QControl service, and we really love that because now we get access into live usage statistics.

We know what we're using, but we also now can verify what Qwest is seeing and verify that those two are correct, and we can use that for any potential sources of fraud, whether people are using our system inappropriately or Qwest's system, somehow using that connection inappropriately."

6. Customer service

"From a customer service perspective, I've been amazed. You always expect some sort of problems whenever you deal with large systems.

You know, we have 6 locations. One of the locations is like 12 miles outside of city boundaries, so there's a lot of sources for problems for us.

And from the sales side, we have had a fantastic sales rep. We ask for really interesting things--things that are not necessarily easy to provide--and he doesn't always have the answer immediately, but he'll get up from his desk, walk over and talk directly to the person that has it. If they're not here, he'll send an e-mail--but I'm always in the loop and he just makes sure that he really thoroughly researches everything and then also follows up. I never have any loose ends when working with our agent.

And the few problems that we have had with Qwest--with the service that we had through Qwest--whenever we've contacted support, the most calls we've ever had on an issue was two.

Every single time, even on the times when we haven't called the right department or whatever, they make sure that we get directed to the people who can help us, and then those people that end up helping us do not get off the phone until the issue is resolved---and they're usually experts.

So it's been really fantastic, and that was something that we really weren't expecting and it's been a really great experience for us."

7. Non-financial benefits

"So a nice thing about Q.Control is we take the records from our phone system, we take the records from Qwest, we compare the two, and we will instantaneously know if and when our system has been compromised, and so that's really important to us. That's not something I expect to happen, but we will now know immediately if that ever happens.

Some of the other benefits from--that we've realized by switching to Qwest was the 75 percent reduction in equipment that we had.

That is really a key for us. We are very focused on uptime quality, and overly complex systems are prone to

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breakage, downtime--whatever.

And some of that's a little bit intangible, but that has been a real plus for us.

By reducing our equipment by 75 percent, what that means is where we had 10 phone systems--10 servers and media gateways before, we now have 2. We have the 2 call center phone systems, and those 2 systems talk directly to Qwest.

We don't do media translation anymore, so we don't convert voice over IP from our agents' desk to T1s, so we have no specialized hardware anymore, and that's really key for us.

We don't have any TDM hardware in our environment anymore, so we just take voice over IP from our agents' stations and hand that directly over to Qwest. No transcoding, no nothing.

Some of the other benefits that we've seen are an increase in audio quality. We have fewer points where we're converting audio from digital to analog, back to digital again, so our audio quality has gone way up.

And not only that--now we can monitor it from one point all the way through our system to where we hand it off to Qwest.

The other benefit that we've seen has been an increase in our uptime and reliability.

We have fewer points of failure now and we don't have any specialized hardware, so if one component fails, there isn't a big rush to try to find a specialized part or to have three spares on site just to replace a part that's difficult to get.

We use off-the-shelf, very available hardware, so if we have any sort of failure, they're very easy to resolve and it's easy to replace any equipment that has failed."

8. Measurable benefits

"Well, some of the measurable benefits we've seen are--the most obvious is we're saving a little over 100,000 dollars a year.

We also went from three service providers through a telecom broker and a very complicated arrangement down to one single provider, and by doing that--by switching to all voice over IP and being able to eliminate the specialized equipment for those TDM, T1 connections, we've eliminated about 35,000 dollars in hardware costs.

Given that we had to spend no resources in actually switching to Qwest and that we already had all of the equipment, we really experienced an immediate ROI. The second we switched over, we'd really recouped pretty much all the costs in doing the switch.

Some of the other measurable benefits would be a reduc[tion] in the complexity of our environment, so now we have--my workload has gone down dramatically, so I spend about 25 percent less time--cumulative, total time--probably 50 percent less time just watching equipment and watching for failures, and I get to really now focus on system improvements whereas before I would be kind of working on monitoring maintenance, now I get to work on some of the improvements to our system and enhancements."

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9. Areas for improvement

"One area that I hope Qwest decides to improve on is to expand this service. It's really powerful. Using voice over IP, you can do more than just voice over IP.

Voice over IP really encompasses quite a lot including video over IP, and so one service we would love to see is the ability to do video in the voice over IP service."

10. Future plans

"We aren't really planning to expand very much, and the reason is we're already using so many services.

We use Qwest Internet, Qwest Metro Ethernet, Qwest voice over IP outbound, inbound--which services really 100 percent of our communications and networking needs. So there aren't too many more services, honestly, that we could actually buy from Qwest."

11. Recommendations and advice

"When moving to voice over IP long distance or consolidating your services, some of the advice I would recommend is to make sure you have all of your information up front--and let me expand on that a little bit.

We went from three different phone service providers through a telecom broker, and so we weren't in direct communication with our current providers, and that really made things very complicated for us. And so it's [important] just to make sure you have all your ducks kind of lined up in a row first before you decide to actually hit the button and make the switch."



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