

Cisco Partner Provides Managed Solution to Canadian Film Distributor

FlexITy's Managed Services get top billing at Alliance Films

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALLIANCE FILMS INC.

- Distributor of motion pictures in Canada
- Offices in Montreal, Toronto, London (England) and Madrid (Spain)
- Approximately 250 employees

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Company wide solution for a data centre and voice, security and wireless services
- New infrastructure for offices in multiple locations
- Cost-effective, 24-hour IT support services

BUSINESS SOLUTION

- Comprehensive solutions including: servers, storage equipment, switches and IP phones
- Cisco Wide Area Application Services (WAAS) and Unified Communications
- End to end Managed Services solution through FlexITy
- Managed Services eliminates upfront capital and creates one point of contact with one monthly bill

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Centralized, secure computing, storage and voice services reduces operational and capital costs while improving compliance and scalability.
- Large multimedia files can be quickly and easily transferred, saving time, improving efficiencies and reducing bandwidth requirements
- Four-digit dialing speeds communications between offices and helps ensure accessibility to employees on the road
- Desktop message access improves voicemail retrieval, saving time and simplifying the process for employees who travel
- 24-hour, worldwide technical support allows the company to focus on its business instead of worrying about IT issues

Business Challenge

Alliance Films is a leading distributor of motion pictures in Canada, with operations in the United Kingdom and Spain. The company distributes filmed entertainment to theatres, on DVD, online and to television broadcasters. Alliance Films holds the Canadian distribution rights to the productions of leading independent studios, including New Line Cinema, Focus Features, The Weinstein Company, Overture Films, A Bigger Boat, Grosvenor Park and Relativity Media.

Following Canwest's takeover of Alliance Atlantis, Alliance Films became an independent company and found itself with three immediate requirements: a new location for its Toronto office and data centre; a cost-effective way to replace the existing Canwest IT support and infrastructure; and a long-term architecture for the data centre, and for the voice, security, and wireless capabilities for all its offices.

It was imperative that Alliance Films find a company-wide and easily supported solution, without having to build an expensive IT department. With approximately 250 employees spread across offices in Montreal, Toronto, Madrid, and London, England, the company was also planning an expansion of its Montreal offices, making it an ideal time to deploy a brand new infrastructure.

Business Solution

Based on strong references, Alliance Films selected Cisco® Gold Partner FlexITy Solutions Inc. to analyze their remote office and data centre: computing, storage, backup and archiving requirements and existing technology.

By leveraging Cisco technology, FlexlTy was able to offer a state-of-the-art, robust solution to help ensure Alliance Films was able to maximize the features and benefits of Cisco Unified Communications and Data Centre. FlexlTy's proposed solution included building a brand new Toronto data centre, and building the infrastructure and components of a new Toronto office and the refreshing and expansion of the Montreal head office. This comprehensive solution included storage equipment, servers, and Cisco switches and Cisco Unified IP Phones.

Cisco Wide Area Application Services (WAAS) was also included in the plan to accelerate applications over the WAN, deliver video to the branch offices and provide local hosting of branch-office IT services. Cisco WAAS allows IT departments to centralize applications and storage in the data centre while maintaining LAN-like application performance, and provides locally hosted IT services while reducing the branch-office device footprint.

An important part of the implementation included 24-hour support and monitoring by FlexlTy, helping ensure the business was covered around the clock. Because of Alliance Films' multinational offices, this was an especially significant benefit because it meant support across all locations. It also meant Alliance Films could have everything included under one service level agreement (SLA), and not worry about technology maintenance or issues.

Businesses no longer want to deal with the trials and tribulations associated with IT, says David Close, of FlexlTy.

"Managed Services is one of the fastest growing parts of our business. What we hear from people on a regular basis is that they want to get a monthly bill and have someone else worry about the IT infrastructure, from the operating system down, while they focus on business issues," he says. "This is what FlexlTy is able to offer to its customers. Alliance Films realized its preference was to buy a service that provides the attention to detail and experience. This allows the company to focus on its core business, with the confidence that a skilled staff, with a single point of contact, is managing their entire technology infrastructure."

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Once the new infrastructure was in place, Alliance Films was eager to implement Unified Communications, leveraging Cisco Unified Communications Manager as the call-processing engine, as recommended by FlexlTy. This offered the company the business advantage of a fully unified workspace, extending Alliance Films' telephony features to network devices including IP phones and mobile devices. Whether they are located in Toronto or Montreal, employees can access their colleagues simply and quickly with four-digit dialing.

"With employees in four cities over two continents, making the choice of going with a Cisco Unified Communications phone system instead of a traditional PBX [private branch exchange] was a bit of a no-brainer," says Nasir Khan, VP of information technology at Alliance Films. "From the research I did, Cisco seemed to be more on the forefront, with better and newer technology when compared to its competitors."

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Just as they chose to buy data services instead of technology, Alliance Films also had the choice of buying voice as a service, without the worry of integrating all the components. The company was looking for a solution that combined the benefits of Cisco Unified Communications in a service that was still flexible and full featured. The solution was FlexTel.

FlexTel is unique to FlexITy customers and is an offering based on Cisco Hosted Unified Communications. A combination of technology, people, and process, FlexTel is a fully-managed Unified Communications solution for enterprise customers providing carrier-grade communication services. Through FlexTel, customers are able to receive services including dial-tone, call control, call and contact centre, local and long distance calling and more.

Results

Since the implementation, benefits can be seen across every aspect of Alliance Films' business.

“We wanted to minimize IT presence by having only a service desk in each office,” says Khan. “With Cisco WAAS, our servers that have been deployed locally can be moved to the data centre without any noticeable changes.”

By using WAAS, large files are transferred quickly and easily between offices and the data centre. For example, if an employee in Montreal accesses a file with WAAS and virtualized servers, the speed of transfer is LAN-like, even though the file is actually stored in the data centre in Toronto. Khan says, “A 100 MB file that used to take 50 seconds to download from the data centre is now taking 5 to 8 seconds using WAAS.”

The new Cisco Unified Communications phone system has also resulted in great benefits for employees, especially those on the road.

“A lot of our executives move between Montreal and Toronto,” Khan says. “Since implementing this solution, they no longer need to tell anyone where they are because the same four-digit phone number travels with them. They are always accessible.”

As well, the Cisco Unity voice messaging solution provides desktop message access to employees, enabling them to retrieve voicemail through any Internet Mail Access Protocol (IMAP) client. This means employees will be able to check phone messages while on their computers, saving time and improving processes for people on the road.

The Cisco WAAS implementation has resulted in bandwidth savings of approximately 80 percent. This reduction in required bandwidth allows more bandwidth for backups, voice, video and additional employees or new applications without adding to the current wide area network (MPLS) services. This means Alliance Films can avoid future costs, but

more importantly, it allows the company to respond at the speed of business to management directives.

PRODUCT LIST

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Catalyst 3750-E Series Switches with Stack Wise Plus
- Cisco Redundant Power System 2300 (RPS 2300)

Network Management

- Cisco Wireless LAN Controller

Security

- Cisco ASA-5510
- WEB SSL VPN

VPN, Video, Voice and IP and Wireless

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager
- Cisco Integrated Unity Voice Messaging
- Cisco Unified SRST (Survivable Remote Site Telephony)
- Cisco Unified IP Phones

Next Steps

With Toronto and Montreal connected by Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS), the next step is to connect London and Madrid using the same architecture as Toronto and Montreal including WAAS. The London office will be added to the IP phone network in late 2008.

“We look forward to having all of our offices up and running, so everyone can reap the rewards we are already seeing in Montreal and Toronto,” says Khan. “The FlexITy team is helpful and knowledgeable, and we’re thrilled to have their expertise and services at our disposal. That, in combination with the quality of Cisco’s products, has helped ensure we have a high-end, state-of-the-art environment.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Cisco Unified Communications, go to <http://www.cisco.com/go/voice>.

To find out more about FlexITy’s Managed Services solution, go to: www.FlexITy.ca



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