

IP Phones Give Island Resort A 'Connected' Room with a View

Cisco Unified IP Phones allow Sonora Resort to offer calling convenience

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
<p>SONORA RESORT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unified Communications • Sonora Island, BC • 68 employees
<p>BUSINESS CHALLENGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote location with no phone or Internet access • Provide modern amenities for clients while maintaining reputation as private, peaceful and upscale retreat • Improve communications capabilities with employees at head office in Richmond, BC
<p>SOLUTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IP phones and Unified Communications solution
<p>BUSINESS RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased employee efficiency with four-digit dialing to headquarters • Enhanced resort amenities and client satisfaction • Improved island communications with addition of phones in guest rooms and wireless Internet access

Business Challenge

Sonora Resort, located on Sonora Island, just off the northeast coast of Vancouver Island, is renowned as a salmon fishing paradise. In recent years, the resort has added conference and spa facilities, helping it achieve 5-star status. It caters to a high-end clientele seeking to “get away from it all” without losing all the conveniences of modern-day life, such as Internet access and telephony service. The resort is owned and operated by the same group that operates London Drugs, a drugstore chain with 68 retail stores located across Western Canada.

When the London Drugs group of companies took over Sonora in 2002, the resort was a relatively small fishing getaway. Accessible only by water or air, the resort had no phones, Internet access and a limited capacity to produce electricity. It attracted an international clientele, but only those interested in salmon fishing.

The new owners wanted to maintain Sonora’s reputation as a peaceful retreat from the hustle of everyday life, while still providing some

modern touches for guests who might be interested in visiting the resort for something other than salmon fishing. The owners added a spa and updated the resort’s rooms and buildings, but still needed to do more to ensure guests had access to the modern communication systems available at most luxury resorts and guarantee phone service would be continuously available and reliable. To accomplish this, Sonora increased its power generation capacity and installed a cellular tower on the island.

Network Solution

The cell tower provides more than just cell phone service. Sonora and its communications provider, TELUS, a [Cisco® Gold Certified partner](#), were able to create the equivalent of a T-1 (Transmission Level 1) MPLS line out of the EVDO network and connected the tower to the resort’s LAN network through a 500-metre fibre line. Sonora also installed fibre around the resort and added wireless access points, so guests could get Internet service almost anywhere on the island. Sonora Resort utilizes Cisco technology to provide WiFi connectivity anywhere on the site.

"We cater to a very high-end clientele," says Nick Curalli, general manager of information technology for London Drugs and Sonora Resort. "We try to exceed our guests' wildest expectations, and introducing the latest technology to the resort helps us achieve that goal."

Another modern amenity that the new owners added was voice service. Sonora teamed up with Cisco and TELUS to install more than 200 [Cisco Unified IP 7970 Phones](#) throughout the guest rooms and common areas at the resort.

"Cisco is a leader in [unified communications](#), so when we began discussing voice solutions for Sonora, we partnered with Cisco," said Brian Clendenin, an account executive with TELUS. "The Cisco Unified Communications platform provides the flexibility and scalability that Sonora needs as it continues to grow its business and amenity offerings."

The phones are connected by Ethernet cable into wall jacks. Voice traffic travels out through the resort's [Cisco Unified Communications Manager Express](#) Private Branch Exchange (PBX) over the T-1 MPLS line through to London Drugs' WAN provided by TELUS to a [Cisco Unified Communications Manager](#) PBX located at London Drugs' headquarters in Richmond, B.C. The Cisco Unified Communications Manager in Richmond links into the main PBX at London Drugs' headquarters, and from there the [voice over IP](#) (VoIP) traffic is treated like regular voice traffic.

"After one season, the phones have been well-used and the satisfaction level is very high. User behaviour gives you an idea of how good a solution really is. And the behaviour we've seen thus far is that people will reach for the VoIP phone before they reach for their cell phone. They've made local, national and international calls – all with no problems."

—Sean Ross, General Manager, Sonora Resort

Business Results

The voice traffic from Sonora receives priority over other traffic travelling over the cell tower's T-1 and the London Drugs' WAN to minimize the chances of a voice call dropping. So far the solution has worked to perfection, Curalli says.

"After one season, the phones have been well-used and the satisfaction level is very high," he notes. "User behaviour gives you an idea of how good a solution really is. And the behaviour we've seen thus far is that people will reach for the VoIP phone before they reach for their cell phone. They've made local, national and international calls – all with no problems."

As an added bonus, because the [Cisco Unified Communications](#) system connects back to London Drugs' PBX, Sonora employees can use four-digit extensions to reach staff at London Drugs' headquarters, instead of having to dial a 10-digit number.

NEXT STEPS

Now that the [Cisco Unified IP Phones](#) have been used successfully at Sonora, the resort is planning to boost their capabilities by rolling out new Extensible Markup Language (XML) applications. All of the phones have colour screens, so they'll be able to support a rich user experience, Curalli says. Unified communications applications could include in-resort information and directories, weather forecasts, daily wildlife activities or the "catch of the day," transportation and spa schedules, and more.

"We're always looking at new ways to do business and innovate," he explains. "Technology plays a big role in that and we plan to take full advantage of our Cisco phones' comprehensive capabilities."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about Cisco Unified Communications, go to:
<http://www.cisco.com/en/US/products/sw/voicesw/index.html>

For ongoing news, please go to <http://newsroom.cisco.com/canada/>

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