

Cisco Calling! IP Telephony connects Summit of the Americas to the world

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*Andrew Sage
Director of Marketing
Cisco Systems Canada*

When 3,000 international journalists and photographers descended on Quebec City, Canada, for the Third Summit of the Americas in April 2001, its state-of-the-art Media Centre bustled with activity from dawn to dusk. Throughout the four-day conference, the journalists and photographers relied on the Media Centre’s telephones and computer network to instantly relay the latest political news to their media outlets back home.

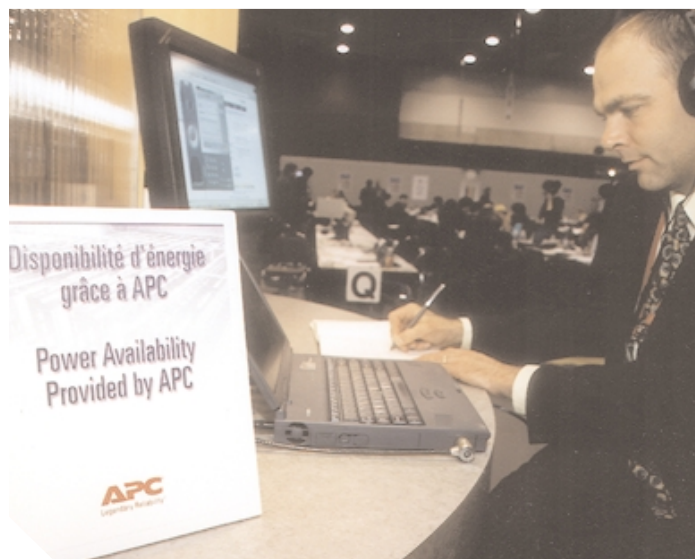
Little did they know it was a shining example of Internet Protocol (IP) telephony at work.

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proved itself time and again at the Summit of the Americas by empowering thousands of international journalists to deliver their time-sensitive stories to all corners of the globe. Based on the technology’s reliability, stability and scalability at this high-profile event, customers building mission-critical networks can rest assured IP telephony is ready for prime time.”

When summit organizers approached Cisco Systems Canada to sponsor the prestigious gathering of Western Hemisphere leaders, the networking leader saw this as a key opportunity to showcase IP telephony to the world. The theme of the Summit was Connectivity. And, as a host country, what better way to demonstrate the Canadian government’s commitment to this agenda than by employing a groundbreaking technology on the site of the Summit. Cisco and the Department of Foreign Affairs agreed to implement in the state-of-the-art media centre so summit organizers could provide a low-cost, high-efficiency voice and data access to journalists regardless of their home base or connectivity requirements. And so planning began, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Offering a dynamic, low-cost alternative to traditional Public Branch Exchange (PBX) networks, IP telephony delivers powerful new capabilities while substantially lowering costs as compared to managing separate voice and data networks.



IP telephony applications include unified messaging, e-learning, voice-enhanced e-commerce, employee collaboration, and anything else that combines the Internet with voice communications and broadband access. By putting IP telephony to work, users realize enhanced customer/consumer contact, greater corporate agility, and simplicity of managing a single connection in the home or office for all communications.

Due to the nature of the event, Cisco was bound by the Summit's strict security policies and was given a concrete date and time for technicians to enter the Media Centre and build the network. That meant the entire network had to be designed within eight weeks and built on-site in about a day.

"There was another event scheduled at the facility before the Summit so we couldn't get in beforehand," recalls project manager Trevor Rodriguez. "And we couldn't install the network once the media arrived. The installation date wasn't flexible at all."

In mid-February 2001, Cisco assembled a virtual team to work on the design and deployment of the Cisco Media Centre. Each of the 10 technicians – who hailed from Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec City and Cisco's corporate headquarters in San Jose, Calif. – had his or her own tasks to complete to move the project along quickly. With time of the essence, weekly conference calls were scheduled to update the team on key project components and resolve critical issues. All configuration work was conducted at Cisco to guarantee speedy installation when the team was finally allowed on site.

One of the most important requirements was that the network be highly available and air-tight. According to Sage, a potential hacker sent an email to all Summit sponsors saying their Web sites would be the target of computer attacks, making the case for a highly reliable network even that much more critical. Cisco teamed up with American Power Conversion of West Kingston, R.I., who provided two Symmetra® 6kVA rackmount power protection units ensure a smooth ride.

"We built a data security environment that was pretty important," says Sage. "Having somebody hack into the Summit network was not an option. And with such time-critical stories being filed by the journalists, we knew we couldn't afford a minute of downtime. So we worked survivability and redundancy into the network design to make it bulletproof. There was two of everything – in some cases four – so that if anything went wrong, there was a backup to take its place."

Had Cisco built separate voice and data networks, says Rodriguez, the entire project would have taken twice as long to complete and required two different skill sets, adding substantially to the cost of the entire project.

"We would have required voice operations people, LAN administrators and a host of other types of skills," he explains. "But with IP, we could operate the network with a pared-down crew."

On the appointed date, the Cisco team was ready to roll. It took just 18 hours to build the powerful IP telephony network, consisting of 300 Cisco IP 7960 telephones, 500 Internet connections for broadband access, a network management station and redundant firewalls. Cisco's \$1.3 CDN-million in-kind contribution of products and services also included a voice, data and security infrastructure for the Summit office.

Incredibly, it wasn't until deployment that many members of the virtual team actually had a chance to meet each other.

"That's a testament to the simplicity of the network design," says Rodriguez. "You don't even have to have a team all in one place working together for months. We did it virtually, each of us with doing our regular day jobs while working on this project on the side, and still we were able to produce a network that worked and functioned the way it was planned."



With much anticipation, the entire Cisco team watched carefully as the Summit got underway and the media arrived on scene. One by one the journalists and photographers made their phone calls, booted up their computers, and quickly left to seek out new story ideas and photo opportunities. Never a complaint, never a worry. The Cisco IP telephony network was as strong as ever.

"At first, we didn't hear a word from anybody," says Sage. "They had their jobs to do and they just wanted to file their stories and move on. Initially nobody saw any difference from a traditional phone system, which we considered quite a victory because underneath the skin the IP network is quite a different environment since it's using the Internet to transmit phone calls. What was at stake was providing a reliable telephone with a reliable dial tone. The fact that the media didn't notice anything different was great."

But soon their curiosity got the better of them. Many journalists were intrigued by the phones' ability to list stock quotes, check the weather or call up other interesting information. When they plugged their laptops into the back of the phones, journalists and

photographers alike were astounded by the 100-Mbps connection to the network and the Internet.

“Photographers are quite a computer-savvy bunch,” says Rodriguez. “They’re used to going into a media centre, searching for a data connection and, if they’re lucky, finding a 56-Kbps dial-up option. At the Summit’s Cisco Media Centre, every desktop had an Ethernet connection at 100 Mbps so photographers could configure their PCs, upload large photo files and use the phone all at the same time. They were really impressed.”

Until another such project comes along, Cisco is continuing to build mission-critical voice-over-Internet protocol (VoIP) networks for customers worldwide.

“The idea behind the Media Centre was to demonstrate that voice-over-IP is ready for prime time,” says Sage. “The technology is changing the way businesses and governments work and interact. Cisco fully supports the Summit’s vision of enhancing connectivity to promote positive change and close the digital divides that exist within the hemispheres. Through IP telephony, countries, businesses and people will realize the potential of the Internet Revolution.”



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