



The Sky Is the Limit as Ascent Expands Operations and Customer Service with a Cisco Business Communication Solution

Executive Summary

Customer Name

- Ascent Home Loans

Industry

- Banking/Finance

Business Challenge

- Streamline internal communications and improve business efficiency
- Cost-effectively scale communications to support business expansion
- Improve communications for mobile employees and independent sales reps

Network Solution

- Cisco Business Communications Solution featuring Cisco Call Manager Express and Cisco Unity® Unified Messaging
- Cisco Integrated Services Routers
- Cbeyond® BeyondVoice™ III communications service

Business Value

- Increased operational efficiency
- Improved response and service to customers
- Up to 40 percent savings in communications costs
- Voice and data network scalability

SMB Select Partner Aardvark IT Solutions Provides Big Business Communications Solutions to the Small Business Market

Ascent Home Loans, headquartered in Denver, Colorado, was experiencing the typical frustrations of an aging PBX telephone system: its 20+ employees waiting endlessly for fax machines to send and receive important paperwork, sales people making stops by the office to pick up voicemails, and the company was unable to support valuable employees who wanted to work from home offices.

“We realized our phone system was affecting our overall business efficiency,” says Michael Dozois, part owner and head of correspondent lending for Ascent. “In order to fulfill our plans to expand into California and attract the high-quality sales representatives we needed, we were going to have to make a change.”

In addition to the headquarters and branch office, Ascent has approximately 150 affiliates around the Western United States that send loans through the company’s central branch.

Ascent was planning to move its headquarters to a new building, and to expand beyond its Denver headquarters and Las Vegas branch office with new branches in California. With phone resources clearly inadequate and a data network that was showing signs of age, Dozois knew the time was right for a new network.

“The network is critical to our business because while we’re based in Denver, we have a lot of employees working in other states,” says Dozois. “Everything funnels through the headquarters. We needed new technology that would tie everything together and make it work as one unit, so that all of our loans are handled correctly and close on time.”

Cisco Partners Work Together to Provide Complete Solution

To help design and deploy this critical network overhaul, Dozois chose to partner with Aardvark IT Solutions, a company focused on providing solutions for small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). Aardvark, with headquarters in Broomfield, Colorado, is a Cisco Premier Certified Partner and SMB Select Partner with specializations in IP and wireless LAN.

“Many small businesses have no IT staff, or a small staff trained primarily in Help Desk-type functions to support a key application or operating system or a network server,” says Wray Smith, president of Aardvark. “However, they often don’t have expertise in network infrastructures and things like designing VPNs, security, network perimeters, and server security. That’s where we come in.”

The solution for Ascent Home Loans also included Cbeyond, which Aardvark has teamed with for a number of years to help bring customers a total communications solution from the carrier service provider to the customer site. Cbeyond was founded in 2000 with the vision of providing enterprise communication tools tailored for small businesses. Cbeyond offers voice and broadband Internet, and enhanced applications such as security, storage, and messaging.

“We had the concept of building a stable, well-connected platform that we could then build applications upon to give customers the tools they need to make their businesses more productive,” says Brooks Robinson, Cbeyond’s chief marketing officer. “We have partnered with Aardvark because it has many valuable relationships with SMB customers. By working together our two companies can develop powerful, robust communications solutions that have traditionally been out of reach for small businesses and deliver them over our Cisco Powered Network.”

Dozois concurs, noting that as Ascent Home Loans grew, it was costing more and more money to keep the phone system in step with business demands, and yet they did not have the

overhead to build an IT staff with the technology expertise the company needed in order to grow.

“Our core business is mortgage lending,” Dozois says. “We are not an IT company. Our phone systems must work and cannot negatively affect our critical core business that we handle each day. I wanted to work with Cisco and Cisco-certified partners so I was assured that we would have all the IT support necessary to take our business to the next level.”

“I felt that Aardvark really offered the best customer service and that its solution would have the best reliability,” Dozois says. “Also, the fact that they are Cisco-certified IP specialists was critical. Cbeyond uses Cisco equipment and infrastructure, and it was important to us that everything that was installed would be certified and backed by a big company. Cisco has a strong reputation and we wanted to work with a company that would put the solution in right the first time, and assure a seamless transition from our old system to the new one.”

Ascent IT manager Kevin Kutsuma notes that Aardvark and Cbeyond working together would deliver a complete and scalable telephony solution.

“The new fiber was important because it triples the amount of incoming lines compared to what we would have with a standard analog system,” he says. “Additionally, Cbeyond can monitor our system 24 hours a day, practically assuring us of no downtime.”

Cisco All-In-One Solution is Like Money in the Bank for Ascent Home Loans

Aardvark and Cbeyond combined the Cisco Business Communications Solution featuring Cisco Call Manager Express (CME) with Cbeyond voice and broadband Internet services. The tightly integrated package combines a managed high-quality local- and long-distance telephony service with T-1 Internet access at a fraction of the cost that large businesses pay for the same telecommunications capabilities.

“We’ve seen a tremendous amount of adoption of IP phone systems,” says Robinson. “These next-generation phone systems are mostly in large enterprises today, but we’re seeing more and more adoption in the small business market.”

Cbeyond has worked closely with Cisco to develop this next generation of voice networking, providing local- and long-distance service with features comparable to, or even better than, the public-switch telephone network. The Cisco IP platform enables Cbeyond to provide broadband Internet plus a host of IP-based applications.

The Direct Inward Dial (DID) feature was deployed, giving Ascent employees the ability to have their own direct phone numbers, not just extensions. Specialized call forwarding, simultaneous rings, and integration of voicemail, email, and faxes are now possible. Cbeyond’s BeyondVoice service along with the Cisco CME solution delivered by Aardvark make a powerful winning combination for Ascent Home Loans.

“Now our salespeople can walk out of appointments, open up their PDAs, see all their voicemails, emails, and faxes, and respond to critical messages before they reach their cars. That is huge in the customer service industry that we are in.”

The Cisco solution is an all-in-one IP Communications system utilizing a Cisco Integrated Services Router. The Cisco Integrated Services Router integrates routing services with voice and data, protective firewalls, and secure VPN capabilities. Ascent’s Cisco IP phones are powered directly by the Integrated Services Router using Power over Ethernet (PoE), eliminating the need for power outlets at each phone.

The Cisco Integrated Services Router operates Cisco CME with Cisco Unity Unified Messaging. Cisco CME provides the affordable, secure call-processing functionality Ascent Home Loans was looking for. And, Cisco Unity Unified Messaging provides integrated messaging services, allowing Ascent employees to listen to their emails over the telephone; check voice and fax messages from their computers; and forward voice messages via email and to any local fax machine.

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The new communications solution has increased employee productivity and customer satisfaction, and as Ascent grows it can offer its independent sales reps the same unified messaging service, easy network access, and toll-free calls that employees enjoy.

The Ascent team expects to see an immediate 30- to 40-percent decrease in overall communications costs, and even more as the company expands as planned. These kinds of savings, along with the improved business efficiency, make the Aardvark/Cbeyond/Cisco solution like money in the bank for Ascent Home Loans.

This customer story is based on information provided by Ascent Home Loans and describes how that particular organization benefits from the deployment of Cisco products. Many factors may have contributed to the results and benefits described; Cisco does not guarantee comparable results elsewhere.

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