

## Phenomenal Networks **Scores** Business Success in Youth Soccer Venue



**What started as a way to gain company exposure and demonstrate the merits of IP telephony has translated into solid new business for Cisco Premier Partner Phenomenal Networks. The company provided a communication center, dubbed IP Call Home, for the Schwan's USA Cup in Blaine, Minnesota. The tournament hosted the largest gathering of youth soccer teams in the Western Hemisphere, with more than 850 teams from 19 countries and 30 states participating.**

This is just the latest in a series of sports venues at which Phenomenal Networks has donated its time, equipment and IP telephony expertise. The company finds international sports events ideal places for exhibiting the power of IP telephony, and in the process provides a valuable service and gathers solid business leads.

### **'Phenomenal' Success at Sporting Events**

Phenomenal Networks, established just a few years ago in early 2001, is the North American subsidiary of Shepherdson Holdings (Pty) Ltd, a 15-year old data communication systems firm ranked as one of the top 20 private companies in South Africa. The firm has provided communications solutions for several high profile sporting-related events in the past, and found that they pay off extremely well for the company in terms of sales in the areas where they staged the promotion.

The company has set up and offered free IP communications for the national rugby and cricket teams in South Africa. Staff members also created and ran a media center for the Brazilian soccer press at the 1996 Olympics and an on-site computer and communications system for the national Brazilian soccer team in France at the 1998 World Cup.

The Schwan's USA Cup was serving a different crowd: youth soccer players from around the world at the largest tournament of its kind.



“For this particular venue, we wanted to prove that we could use IP-based technology for telephoning internationally and locally, as well as integrating the IP phone into the back end of a live database,” said Alan Ainsworth of Phenomenal Networks. “There are a lot of corporations in the United States with international sales and marketing offices or that handle manufacturing overseas. Soccer-related parents in the U.S. tend to have high demographics so this was good exposure for us.”

Phenomenal Networks approached the tournament organizers and offered to set up an IP telephony system at tournament headquarters in the National Sports Center complex located in Blaine. The tournament organizers didn't have to consider the offer for very long before accepting.

“What Phenomenal Networks wanted to do filled an enormous need for us,” said Teri Vogt, tournament director of the Schwan's USA Cup. “We're hosting about 13,000 kids, and 45 of those teams are from overseas. That translates into a lot of really homesick kids. Helping these children deal with homesickness is a very real issue for us, and the ones who have traveled from another country can have a particularly tough time. In previous years, the international players either did not call home due to cost, or used the phones of the local host families with whom they were staying. Even those families who monitored phone use closely were sometimes unpleasantly surprised with a phone bill approaching several hundred dollars!”

### **Operation 'IP Call Home'**

What Phenomenal Networks proposed was a booth with 10 IP phones on workstations that were connected to a Cisco system. It would allow each and every participant to call home for five minutes anywhere in the world, every day of the tournament, for free.

In order to make this a reality, Phenomenal Networks pulled up stakes and basically moved its office to the sports complex. They designed the required system and contracted for the T1 backbone connections. They then worked with local technical staff to install the lines and system at the National Sports Center. The center was tournament headquarters and the central hub for the whole tournament, providing a main gathering place for participating team for all players during tournament week.



With enthusiastic support from Cisco, the Phenomenal Networks team went to work. They used Java XML to design special applications on the telephone. By touching a few buttons, the young players using the IP phones could access a world clock (to make sure they weren't calling their families in the middle of the night), find their country's dialing codes, look up worldwide weather reports, and access a currency exchange site. The Phenomenal staff also integrated access to the tournament database so the callers could keep their families informed of the very latest in scores, schedules and standings. Once the tournament was underway, Phenomenal Networks staff manned the booth and helped show the players how to use the system to call home. The players found the system very easy to use.



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“During the first two days we assisted the children, but after that they helped each other,” said Dave Shepherdson, CEO of Phenomenal Networks. “It was great to watch the younger children showing the older ones how to use the technology. Pretty soon our biggest challenge was keeping the kids within their five-minute call allotment!” Word traveled quickly, and soon kids were lined up at 9:00 a.m. each morning waiting for the booth to open at 10:00 a.m.

“I know my team got on the phones as much as possible,” said Matthew Bishop, coach of a girls’ under-16 team that traveled to the tournament from Wales. “This was their first trip to America, and when we made it to the semi-finals, they couldn’t wait to call and tell their families. And needless to say, the parents back home love being able to stay in touch.”

### **Sporting Events Are a Winner for Cisco Partner**

In the end, Ainsworth and Shepherdson wanted to demonstrate that the IP systems are easily mobile, easy to set up, and can easily handle international calls.

“Based on our international perspective, we know how very expensive international calls can be,” said Ainsworth. “With everyone watching the bottom line, and with some people wary of traveling internationally these days, business people are cutting back on travel. The Schwan’s USA Cup was the perfect place to demonstrate that there is no reason not to use this technology and save a lot of money.” The Phenomenal Networks team estimated that more than 6,000 calls were placed by the end of the tournament, saving the players and local hosting families upwards of \$100,000 in phone charges.

And the effort will probably help Phenomenal Networks’ bottom line as well: it’s gotten solid sales leads from a Swedish businessman setting up offices in Chicago, and the mayor’s office in Santiago, Chile thinks the system can help deliver tuition to 100,000 students studying there.

“Not only do we get exposure for ourselves and for this terrific technology, we sure put a lot of smiles on kids’ faces,” said Ainsworth. “And that is icing on the cake!”



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