



Connections—May 2005

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Meadow Lark Agency Finds Success with Cisco IP Telephones

Mike Kandas, President of Meadow Lark Companies, a national freight motor carrier based in Billings, had a serious problem. His Toshiba PBX phone system was going down on a daily basis, creating a huge impact on the daily call volume of over 7,000 calls.

When Mike contacted The Connect Group, he was looking to replace his PBX phone system with a similar system and stressed that time was of the essence.

Connect prepared and submitted two options,

a Legacy TDM based PBX system and an IP Telephone system by Cisco Systems. Upon the first meeting Mike's IS team was convinced that IP Telephony was not the way to go; stating concerns with voice quality and reliability as well as concerns that the voice traffic would cripple the speed of his data on the network. "They were very concerned that the call volume level they dealt with would greatly hinder data traffic," said Matt Duray of Connect. "As we talked it became apparent that the reasons they stated for not going with IP telephony where the very rea-

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School District 2 Enhances Security with Paging System

Spy-Ware Exposed

Recent studies show that spy ware (including Trojans and system monitors) is the fastest growing online security threat facing today's computer user.

Privacy experts recommend that every computer connected to the Internet should be protected with anti-spy-ware software installed.

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When School District 2 specified a paging system for its Adult Education program, several issues needed to be addressed. The system would have to integrate with systems already installed in the facility as well as add emergency call features to each classroom. "The emergency distress button is the most critical element of the system, over the past few years there have been occasions when a crisis has occurred, but nobody was alerted until the crisis had already ended," stated Woody Jensen of School District 2, Adult Education Program.

In addition to bringing the adult education program into compliance with the school district's safety policy, Connect needed to integrate the system with an existing Dukane paging system for the 3rd floor academy.

The multi-zone system put in place to pro-

vide communication and safety was the Valcom paging system. This system is already a standard in several locations across the school district and consists of 23 talk back speakers for the classrooms and 66 paging speakers for all other areas. Teachers and staff are now able to use the Valcom for broadcasting announcements and paging to each individual classroom. Connect also installed emergency call boxes in each room. In the event of an emergency, the teacher or any student can press the red call button, and an emergency call will be placed to the adult education office allowing real time analysis of a situation that may require emergency services.

The system helped bring the entire building into compliance with School District 2 safety policy and greatly enhanced communication throughout the facility, putting faculty and students in a safer, more connected environment.

Cisco NOW Van Tours Montana

In April many business people across Montana experienced the latest real world, small and medium-sized business solutions from Cisco Systems, in a mobile showcase designed to educate and interact.

The Cisco Network on Wheels (NOW) is a 25-foot mobile showcase equipped with the latest Cisco networking technologies designed specifically for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). The showcase provided hands-on demonstrations of proven integrated networking solutions, which are customizable to any business size and need.

Once on-board the Cisco NOW Van, visitors experienced interactive demonstrations of technology solutions designed to enhance a companies competitive edge - maximize productivity and ROI, enhance customer care and loyalty, increase user satisfaction and reduce operating costs - ultimately driving business growth.

The four key networking solutions included:

IP Communications Solutions:

- Lower costs and expand business capabilities by adding voice and video to the data network.

Security Solutions:

- Safeguard the business with integrated network security.

Mobility/Wireless Solutions:

- Increase organizational productivity and reduce expenses while in office, on the road or at home.

Network Foundation Solutions:

- Enablement of new business applications to enhance employee productivity and reduce network costs.

"This was a great way for everyone to see the latest technology from Cisco Systems," said Matt Duray, president of Connect Telephone & Computer Group. "Cisco has made great strides in telecommunications technology and adapting it to help businesses maximize their efficiency and value. Having the Cisco NOW Van here in our own backyard is a great opportunity for Montana businesses to see so many new advancements at once."

Meadow Lark Continued...

sons they should consider it."

With a daily call volume of over 7,000 calls, each hour of down time represented over 800 calls lost. With a traditional PBX system there was no option for a redundant automatic failover system, if the system fails; calls stop.

Connect recommended a Cisco based IP system with redundant call servers as well as redundant voice gateways supporting both local and long distance digital DID trunks. At the core of the system Connect recommended a 24-port Gigabit core switch connecting 3 48-port 10/100 power over Ethernet switches.

Convinced that Cisco would offer the most redundancy and business continuance and a guarantee from Connect that voice quality and data flow would not be compromised, Meadow Lark signed the deal and Connect began implementation in February of 2005.

The system has brought several benefits to Meadow Lark beyond basic call handling. With the addition of the new data switches, data traffic speed increased dramatically, allaying fears of data congestion caused by voice traffic. Telephone moves are now handled by the internal IT staff, eliminating the need to hire a service provider to come out and move traditional hardwired phones. When a call comes into the system one of 4 receptionists will handle and route the call to one of

several working call groups. Within these groups, if a call is directed to a specific individual and that individual is not available anyone in the group can handle the call.

Transition to the phone system was brief and efficient, with

most users being productive after only 1 hour of phone training. To date Connect and Meadow Lark have made a few minor changes and additions to the system adding to the achievement of the goal of increased efficiency and security.

"As we talked it became apparent that the reasons they stated for not going with IP telephony where the very reasons they should consider it."

Network Protection...It's Worth the Time!

Networks are an integral part of most businesses; unfortunately, many businesses don't have the people, resources or the know-how to properly maintain their networks. Not properly maintaining your system on a regular basis can lead to serious consequences like system slow-down or system failure, virus attack and a host of other security issues.

If you are a company that keeps personal information of any type on your systems, you are at particular risk. There is a huge world market right now for personal information, especially from Americans. Thieves and terrorist organizations use this information to create bogus identities for themselves or sell the information to other groups that bring a host of crimes on this country. Other risks companies face are open access from the outside to your network. Hackers gaining access to a network or system that is on the Internet and not protected by

a firewall will use this access to spy on you or launch denial of service attacks on other networks from your PC.

These threats can be controlled and contained with some basic tools and regular system maintenance. Two systems that are critical to protecting your network are a properly configured firewall and consistently upgraded virus protection software. This will keep your system locked from hackers and protected from most viruses. It's also very important to keep operating systems upgraded to current levels to maintain security and, of course, don't forget those daily backups!

The amount of time it takes to maintain your network depends on the number of PC's and complexity of the network. A good rule of thumb when determining how much time to dedicate to your network is 30 minutes per pc per month and

Spy Ware Exposed - Are You Protected?

Spy-ware is any technology that aids in gathering information about a person or organization without their knowledge. On the Internet (where it is sometimes called a *spybot* or *tracking software*), spy ware is programming that is put in someone's computer to secretly gather information about the user and relay it to advertisers or other interested parties. Spy-ware can get in a computer as a software virus or as the result of installing a new program.

Data collecting programs that are installed with the user's knowledge are not, properly speaking, spy-ware, if the user fully understands what data is being collected and with whom it is being shared. However, spy-ware is often installed without the user's consent, as a drive-by download.

A drive-by download is a program that is automatically downloaded to your computer, often without your consent or even your knowledge. Unlike a pop-up download, which asks for assent (albeit in a calculated manner likely to lead to a "yes"), a drive-by download is carried out invisibly to the user, or as the result of clicking some option in a deceptive pop-up window. Ad-ware, software designed to serve advertising, can usually be thought of as spy-ware as well because it almost invariably includes components for tracking and reporting user information.

Spy-ware Defined

Definition-

- All web-originating forms of user privacy violation.
- Any program that tracks, compiles & reports user activity & actions to a 3rd party.
- Mostly tied to the browser, but can inject Operating System applications & services.

Composition-

- Tracking cookies, log files, browser helper objects & other processes.

Legitimate Spy ware-

- Tracking systems contractually agreed upon by users & their employers.

Unwelcome & Malicious Spy ware-

- Tracking systems that do any of the following:
 - Install without permission
 - Misrepresent their purpose
 - Interferer with & misdirect the user interface
 - Report user activity/data to unwelcome 3rd parties.

Spy-ware Action Plan

- User education, awareness
- Be wary of free downloads, Email solicitations, etc..
- Preventive maintenance program
- Anti-Spy ware products...What to look for:
 - Integration with Anti Virus & Personal Firewall
 - Centralized installation & management
 - Central policy control to allow/deny specific applications
 - Track record in signature updates
 - Prevention capability
 - Update & cleanup without a reboot
 - Commitment & expertise with behavior blocking
- Consult the professionals



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