JOHN AKRIDGE COMPANIES USE INTEGRATED QUINTUM AND bCONVERGENT SOLUTION TO OPTIMIZE SCALABILITY, RELIABILITY AND COST-EFFICIENCY OF PHONE COMMUNICATIONS

Leading DC Area Real Estate Developer Expands Their Existing PBX Using IP Telephony, and Supports 28 Branch Office Sites From Headquarters

The Challenge

The John Akridge Companies has more than 10.7 million square feet of upmarket commercial real estate under its management or in construction at 28 sites throughout the Washington DC area (18 are currently being managed and 10 are under construction). That kind of business puts a lot of demand on a phone system. Tenants expect great service, which means that Akridge's concierge staff spends a lot of time on the phone with corporate headquarters and other Akridge sites. Construction crews at sites under development also need robust phone communications. So, as Akridge's business grew, it needed its phone system to grow as well.

Unfortunately, the company's PBX system hit the wall in 2002. Adding new stations or additional trunks would have required an expensive upgrade to a system whose long-term value would still remain uncertain. So it didn't make sense to invest in a PBX overhaul. At the same time, Akridge's management wanted to leverage and preserve the investment it had already made in the existing PBX infrastructure.

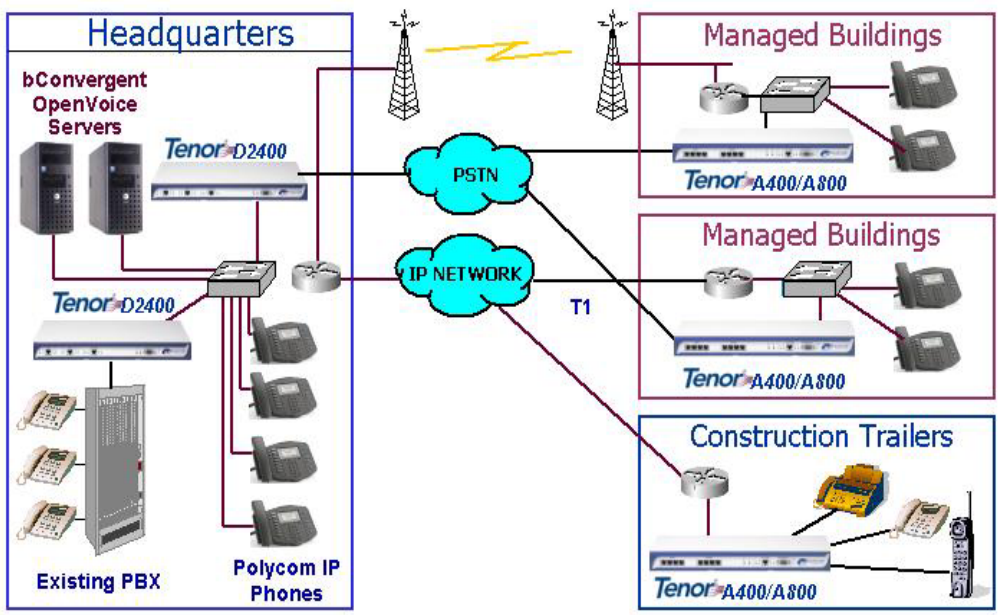
Akridge had other clear objectives as well. Because its sites are spread across DC, Maryland and Virginia, inter-office calling costs – billed as "local toll calls" – were getting too high. In fact, it sometimes cost more to call a building several miles away than it did to call across the country. Akridge also needed to control the costs associated with provisioning phone service for the numerous construction trailers placed at its job sites during early phases of building. Purchasing and installing telephone systems and telephone lines at each of those sites was both costly and time consuming.

Finally, Akridge wanted to have some form of disaster recovery/business continuity in place for its phone service in the case of a prolonged power outage, snowstorm or other problem in the area. That preparedness was important for securing the company's financial well-being.

The VoIP Solution

As an aggressive technology leader, Akridge had already installed fiber connections to many of its buildings in order to provide high-speed Internet access to its tenants. Akridge also uses wireless networking to extend those connections to buildings where fiber is not available.

This robust network infrastructure provided a superb foundation for internet telephony. After evaluating available VoIP products, Akridge decided to go with bConvergent's OpenVoice IP PBX Software and Quintum's Tenor line of VoIP MultiPath Switches. The integrated solution was well-suited to Akridge's business objectives and offered a more cost-effective overall solution than competing brands. Installation and operation of the OpenVoice software and Tenor hardware also looked to be easier and less time-consuming than alternative products.



Akridge installed two Quintum Tenor PRI switches in their main office bridging the PRI connection between the local PSTN and their old PBX. Combined with the OpenVoice software, this enabled Akridge to route inbound calls to anywhere within their enterprise, and, provide least cost routing for outbound calls originating in the main office. Akridge also attached Tenor analog gateways to eight remaining legacy PBX station ports to effectively create direct dial IP ports, allowing the company to scale the system and add several new high-end IP speakerphones at the main office.

With the Tenor PRI switches in place, Akridge was able to install Polycom IP phones on the desks of senior executives within the main building and at the concierge offices of its various remote buildings. Voice communications between these buildings and the main office could take place across the existing IP data network – via the fiber links and wireless connections that were already in place. The bConvergent Open Voice Software was able to integrate the existing PBX and the IP phones into the same dial plan so that the IP phones worked with the existing PBX extensions seamlessly.

At the construction trailers, Akridge installed both Quintum switches and IP telephones.

The entire installation was completed in phases at a cost of less than $20,000. The project was executed by in-house staff with assistance from bConvergent, makers of OpenVoice™ IP PBX. Special care was taken so that the cutover from conventional voice to VoIP took place without any interruption to the business.

A Wealth of Benefits

Akridge's VoIP implementation has been a huge success. The company has realized several significant business benefits, including:

Reduced Toll Costs

Interoffice telephone calls now run over Akridge's own network, eliminating toll charges.

Greater Scalability

Akridge's business growth is no longer limited by its PBX's port capability.

Inexpensive, Robust Phone Capabilities on Construction Sites

The new Quintum/bConvergent VoIP system gives remote users full access to main office PBX functionality at a fraction of the cost.

Business Continuity

Akridge sites will now retain their ability to communicate in the event that there is a failure of the IP network, the public switched network or at the main office.

Just as important, Akridge can fully leverage the world's most important business tool – the telephone – to deliver superior customer service and grow its business without being bogged down by factors such as telecommunications costs or system scalability.

"bConvergent's IP-PBX software and Quintum's VoIP switches provide us with a significant competitive advantage over companies that are still using conventional phone systems," says Tommy Russo, Director of Technology for Akridge. "This was a low-risk initiative that will generate substantial returns on a relatively modest initial investment of capital and effort."