

# NEXT LEVEL

TAKING VOICE TO THE

Migration to a Cisco unified communications system helps insurance company's global teams collaborate and call centers solve customer issues more efficiently.

Communication across globally dispersed teams can be a challenge. This is particularly true if each location has a different phone system with its own unique features, quirks and reliability characteristics.

Such was the case with Allianz Global Corporate & Specialty or AGCS. A global division of Allianz Group, the firm offers large property and liability insurance and risk management solutions via a network of offices throughout the world.

In order to provide more consistent, reliable communication across its global teams, AGCS moved to a converged voice, data and unified communications (UC) infrastructure. The new system is much more reliable and scalable than the mix of legacy phone systems the firm had previously. And it provides AGCS with advanced communication capabilities that greatly enhance global collaboration and call center response.

Cost savings have also been a major benefit of voice and data convergence as well. In fact, when the firm went through a major acquisition in 2009 – virtually doubling in size – its telephony operating costs remained about the same.

To further ensure system reliability, the company relies on third-party management of its UC deployment. The results include faster decision-making plus major productivity and customer service improvements – primary requirements in a highly competitive business environment.

## Collaborating Across the Globe

Fast, reliable communication is essential for any global insurance business and AGCS is no exception. With headquarters in Munich, Germany, the firm works with engineering, marine, aviation and energy-related companies, delivering solutions for the management, control and reduction of risks.

AGCS boasts Allianz offices in more than 70 major cities and countries including New York, Toronto, Chicago, Munich, London, Paris, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Mexico City, Brazil, Colombia, Belgium, South Africa, Dubai and Argentina. This enables the firm to service clients in more than 150 countries worldwide.

As part of its transition from regional to global product-based teams, AGCS replaced multiple dispersed TDM-based phone systems with a single robust IP telephony (IPT) network. In addition to moving to converged voice and data, AGCS elected to use carrier and SIP trunking services from Level 3 Communications.

The firm's unified communications platform is based on Cisco Unified Communications Manager (UCM), formerly Cisco CallManager. The new system provides advanced, consistent communication and reliability across its various offices.

"We have staff members in the U.S. who communicate with their European counterparts on a regular basis," says Perry Canning, network manager, Allianz Global Corporate & Specialty Americas. "We also work with vendors, brokers and customers who expect to connect with the right person right away when they need to.

"Communication was just too difficult with so many different phone systems, including some that were not terribly reliable," he adds. "Our global CEO wanted a single, reliable, robust phone system that would enable people to get in touch with each other and collaborate much more easily."

## UC Features

Cisco's Unified Communications Manager offers robust, reliable IP communications for up to 80,000 users. In addition to comprehensive traditional telephony features, UCM provides advanced UC features such as video, mobility, presence and full conferencing services that make it much simpler and more efficient for global teams to communicate and collaborate.

Thanks to the UC solution, AGCS staff no longer suffers from the communications reliability and cost issues it once had connecting offices and team members across the world. While the initiative began in the U.S., every AGCS office and call center now uses the same highly reliable, redundant IP-based phone system, with the same equipment and features.

With powerful UC features such as built-in conferencing, presence, instant messaging (IM) and "Find Me/Follow Me," AGCS's global team members can connect much more easily and in more ways than ever before. AGCS's call centers are also more reliable and provide faster, more effective customer service.

"Presence, IM, easy conferencing and Find Me/Follow Me make collaboration across global teams more fast and efficient," Canning says. "With presence and the instant messenger client, you can always see on your computer screen when someone is on the phone. It makes it that much easier to pull together a quick conference with two or three people around the world."

The company has found that Find me/Follow me is a feature many people really like. This is particularly true in the IT department. Here

## At A Glance:

**COMPANY:**  
Allianz Global Corporate & Specialty

**HEADQUARTERS:**  
Munich, Germany

**EMPLOYEES:**  
3,700

**I.T. STAFF:**  
140, including 45 in North America

**BUSINESS:**  
AGCS is a global division of the Allianz Group specializing in large property and liability insurance policies for engineering, marine, aviation and energy-related companies.

staffers are expected to respond to calls quickly at any hour.

Find Me/Follow Me allows callers to contact users through a single telephone number, no matter which of their many phone devices they happen to be using. "It's comforting to know that if someone really needs to get hold of me, their call will ring at the office and on my smartphone," Canning says.

AGCS executives also find Cisco's mobility features indispensable. "Our executives do a lot of international traveling," says Mike Rubin, head of IT Americas for Allianz Global Corporate & Specialty. "It really helps when they can log into the phone system remotely from an airport or hotel room, pick up calls at their office number and have all these advanced telephony features at their fingertips."

Mobile users also like the softphone feature of the Cisco solution, offering phone calls from a notebook computer. And video chat is a feature AGCS plans to take advantage of down the road.

The firm's advancements in IPT also allow its call centers to offer much better customer service. This is thanks

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to a robust IP-based call center system with advanced features such as remote call-in and skills-based routing, rather than the legacy hunt groups the call centers used to rely on. (Hunt group refers to using a process or algorithm to select which line will receive a call.)

"The new system provides many more capabilities to our agents, so they can be much more strategic in how they handle calls," Rubin says. "Our customers get the benefit of a more robust, reliable system than we had before." While the call centers have not yet taken advantage of web integration, they are considering doing so down the road.

AGCS's failover and redundancy capabilities are also improved. "The combination of redundant unified communications servers in Chicago and New York plus SIP trunking provide powerful disaster recovery capabilities that yield virtually 100 percent uptime," Canning adds.

Thanks to SIP trunking, outages at branch offices and call centers are no longer an issue. "If an office loses its WAN link, it can still dial out through a backup line and receive voicemail," Rubin says.

### Lean IT Team

AGCS subscribes to a very lean IT business model and philosophy. The firm works with only 140 IT personnel – including 45 in the U.S. – supporting its global workforce of more than 3,700.

"Our goal is to keep the IT head count low by outsourcing functions wherever we can," Rubin says. "In doing so, we look for strategic technology partners that offer flexibility, scalability and deep expertise in their areas of technology."

"We expect to work with providers as partners and members of our own team,

**Contact CDW for a unified communications solution that allows employees, partners and customers to communicate and collaborate more effectively.**

not simply as contractors and certainly not as adversaries," Canning adds.

AGCS first approached its legacy voice carrier for help, but quickly understood that they had little interest in helping the firm with its IPT overhaul. That's what brought AGCS to CDW and the Cisco Unified Communications solution.

AGCS found Cisco UCM attractive because it provided the power, scalability, redundancy, flexibility and room for growth needed to accommodate the recent acquisition. And with more customer activity revolving around the firm's Dallas and St. Louis call centers, AGCS liked the call center features and robustness of UCM.

Cisco was a vendor that AGCS already knew and trusted. "We were a Cisco shop, so we had a lot of experience with their products," Canning says. "I'm a network guy and the Cisco approach was easier than the others to translate for someone with a networking background. We also liked Cisco's integration with Active Directory and the ease of use and instant messaging integration of its software client."

AGCS also upgraded its WAN connection with the installation of Cisco Catalyst 6500 Series Switches. "This improved not only IP telephony, but our entire LAN and WAN infrastructure," Canning says.

Finally, AGCS chose to outsource ongoing management of its LAN, WAN and unified communications solution to CDW. "It made sense to us to have the people who set up the system maintain it," Canning says. "CDW brought lots of management expertise to the table and let us focus our resources on other pressing IT demands."

AGCS finds that one of the great things about the Cisco solution is its ability to grow. "When we first set up the system, we weren't sure which of the many unified communications options we would need," Canning says. "The Cisco solution allows us to take advantage of its features gradually as we digest the technology and all its capabilities." ■

## A True PARTNER

Allianz Global Corporate & Specialty's lean IT philosophy would never work without expert, dependable partners who know how to work as members of a team. "I've done a lot of projects in the past eight years and the level of partnership with CDW was really extraordinary," says Mike Rubin, head of IT Americas for AGCS.

"The CDW folks were truly part of our team, always working for the same goals as ours," says Perry Canning, network manager at AGCS. "We talked with our CDW partners on a regular basis and could tell very quickly that they really knew the technology inside out."

In addition, the level of trust between CDW and Allianz helped propel a complex project with a tight deadline to a successful completion. "The IT professionalism of Allianz and CDW's adept AT Consulting team helped us work through issues to allow delivery of the project within budget and the timeline agreed upon," says CDW's Advanced Technology AE Chris Mortonson.

CDW is one of the largest telecom agents in the country, working with more than 50 unique carriers offering multiple telecommunication-related services, including WAN, Internet, voice and hosting.

"We thoroughly evaluated every applicable carrier option," says Ed Wu, voice and data specialist at CDW. "We then pared the list down to the strongest few for the final negotiations based on their ability to deliver upon AGCS's specific requirements."

"They already had good relationships with the carriers and a wealth of knowledge about them that we just didn't have internally," Canning says. "They talked to all the vendors and made a recommendation based on our requirements, but they were very flexible. We never felt they were pushing a particular carrier solution."