

## County Agency Enhances Ability to Transform Lives.

Fresno County Workforce Teams with Cisco Silver Partner AMS to Deploy Cisco Unified Communications.

### Executive Summary

#### Fresno County Workforce Investment Board

- Government
- Fresno, California
- 350 Employees

#### Business Challenges

- Network components reaching end-of-life, prompting support issues/costs
- Tight installation deadline had to be met or funding for project was lost
- Productivity hours lost during commute to meetings and waiting for moves, adds, and changes

#### Network Solution

- Cisco Unified Communications with Cisco Unified CallManager and Cisco Unity unified messaging
- Cisco 2811 ISR Router, Cisco 2800 Series Routers with SRST, Cisco Catalyst, and PoE switches
- Cisco Unified Video Advantage
- Nearly 400 Cisco Unified IP Phones

#### Business Results

- Employees have more time to productively work with clients, helping to provide job training and employment opportunities
- IT staff can easily self-manage the network and is freed up for more strategic projects
- Agency enabled to consider alternative ways to communicate remotely with clients in need

The Fresno County WIB (Workforce Investment Board), known as Workforce Connection, recently overcame end-of-life and vendor support issues by implementing Cisco® Unified Communications across its multisite organization. The end-to-end Cisco solution, designed and deployed by Cisco Silver Certified Partner AMS.NET, met a very tight rollout schedule and has resulted in the organization better managing a complex system of job training and placement services that enables its clients to improve their lives.



The Fresno County Workforce Investment Board is a nonprofit corporation formed to run a federally funded program that mobilizes and integrates private and public partners. The program effectively educates, trains, and places individuals with the resources and skills to fulfill employer needs. Its dynamic and comprehensive workforce investment system embraces all segments of Fresno County and produces positive results for job seekers and employers.

The multisite organization, which was operating on an inherited voice and data infrastructure, was starting to experience some support issues on its Avaya switching infrastructure. With a number of network components reaching end-of-life, Ian Mearns, deputy director for the Workforce Connection, knew that if he failed to replace some equipment, the entire network could be in big trouble.

“The vendors were not going to offer support on much of our equipment unless we upgraded,” says Mearns. “Although at that time everything was working fine, I knew that in the event of a failure, we risked being unable to function.” Mearns prepared a request for proposal (RFP) to solicit bids for either an upgrade or replacement of the organization’s network, whichever would be most cost competitive. He was up against a tight timeframe for federal funding, so whoever won the bid had to guarantee installation by the deadline or they would not get paid.

Among the many organizations responding to the bid, one stood out: a Cisco network solution bid prepared by Cisco Silver Certified Partner AMS.NET.

As Mearns and his team evaluated the RFP bids, they first considered pricing. The AMS.NET and Cisco bid was competitive in pricing, and could deliver the feature sets that Mearns was looking for. He felt a converged data/voice solution would be cost-effective for the organization, as would the ability to provide video conference calling. Mearns narrowed the bids down to four different vendors, and after careful reviewing, found that the AMS.NET and Cisco bid was most competitive when he considered the feature sets, pricing, cost of installation, and the ability to meet his demanding installation timeframe.

As a Cisco Silver Certified Partner, AMS.net is an all-inclusive network integration firm that has focused on the government and K-12 and higher education markets for 18 years. Its range of services spans network consultation and design through to post-installation support.

“A government organization looking at new or upgraded technology typically wants to lower the total cost of ownership,” says Tom Vasconi, senior account manager with AMS.NET. “We are seeing cities, counties, and schools wanting to migrate away from the high costs of maintenance contracts for their disparate communications (voice, video, data and intercom) solutions. In most circumstances these organizations have dedicated people on salary maintaining all of these various systems. It really makes an impact on them when we show them how a converged solution with Cisco Unified Communications can save money, plus provide additional features and functions, all in an open-standards solution that is easy to add onto as they need it.” Vasconi and the AMS.NET team recognize that government organizations often do not have the budget up front for an entirely new system with complete features. It has developed a sales process to show the organization everything up front, and how additional features like paging or call accounting or a fax solution can be added on later as the budget allows.

“It is important to us that we build a real relationship with our customers and show them that we are not just interested in pushing products through their door, but developing real solutions and staying with them for the long haul,” says Vasconi. For the Fresno County Workforce Investment Board, the task would entail designing and deploying a Cisco Unified Communications system across eight facilities, with site sizes varying from 6 up to 200 users.

Once Vasconi got the notice from the Fresno County Workforce Investment Board to proceed, he assembled a team and did a design check to make sure that the solution AMS.NET proposed would meet all of the work requirements. This meant stepping through the solution carefully and discussing options to help ensure that the board was getting the most out of every dollar. An initial meeting was held to assign major roles on the project and to build a deployment plan. The tight deadline would allow just two weeks for actual deployment so careful planning was essential. Since the solution was to be a turnkey Cisco Unified Communications system, each department was interviewed to understand how it used its phones and what it needed out of a communications system. AMS.NET then designed and configured the dial plans, and acted as a liaison between the board staff and the local service provider.

The AMS.NET solution designed and deployed for the Fresno County Workforce Investment Board included two Cisco Unified CallManager servers with Cisco Security Agent, Cisco Unity® Unified Messaging, a new Cisco 2811 ISR Router as the core voice gateway, Cisco Catalyst®, and PoE (Power over Ethernet) switches. Cisco 2800 series ISR Routers would be the gateways for the county’s remote locations providing Survivable Remote Site Telephony, and AMS.NET would also deploy Cisco Unified Video Conferencing. Nearly 400 Cisco Unified IP Phones would be deployed, and AMS.NET

worked with Mearns to recommend a mixture of about eight different models depending on individual needs. The solution also includes Cisco Unified Video Advantage, which provides video telephony functionality to Cisco Unified IP Phones, making video telephony as easy as a phone call.

Vasconi and the AMS.NET team worked closely with Cisco personnel to help ensure that the necessary hardware and software were available and that the deployment deadline could be met. As orders were processed the AMS.NET project manager and installation team met with Mearns to design the dial plans. As much as possible was done early, such as loading Cisco Unified CallManager servers, planning the configuration for switches, and determining the dial plan and what service features were needed on the phones.

“We deployed a lot of resources for this project to make sure that it was successful,” says Vasconi. “We sent our vice president of technical services down for the final deployment days, and Ian made his staff available because they had the best local onsite knowledge.” Both teams worked well together, and that, along with the careful initial planning done by the AMS.NET team, made for a successful deployment.

With the Cisco solution now in place, Fresno County Workforce Connection is enjoying benefits beyond traditional telephony.

Mearns says the unified messaging capabilities delivered by Cisco Unity make it a great productivity tool that enhances employees’ ability to be more effective in the workplace.

“The work that we do changes peoples’ lives, and it requires very complex planning that used to be a big drain on resources. Cisco Unified Communications enables us to better manage our complex system of services. The result is that we are spending less time managing tasks and more time helping people.”

—Ian Mearns, deputy director for the Workforce Connection

“With all voice and e-mail messages going to a single inbox, employees can manage their time more effectively and respond to people more quickly,” he says. “The work that we do changes peoples’ lives, and it requires very complex planning that used to be a big drain on resources. Cisco Unified Communications enables us to better manage our complex system of services. The result is that we are spending less time managing tasks and more time helping people.” That time helping clients will increase several hours per month for employees traveling to meetings. Utilizing Cisco Unified Video Conferencing allows Fresno County Workforce employees to easily access face-to-face communications via their Cisco Unified IP Phone, freeing up even more time to focus on helping clients.

The Workforce’s mobile, dynamic workforce created high demand for moves, adds, and changes. These tasks are now simplified for Mearns’ staff, and employees lose no productivity time while they wait for a phone to be moved. Mearns says his staff learned system administration very quickly, and is now more productive because it can work on more strategic projects.

“Ian and his staff used to handle a high number of support calls every day for the old system that had minimal support,” says Vasconi. “That has now shifted to a system that has complex hardware and delivers very powerful features, yet he is supporting it himself. The Cisco technology support is outstanding. They prioritize needs, and if Ian has a system emergency, he makes one call and it is worked through.”

“The service and support are vastly superior to what we received from the vendor of our old system,” agrees Mearns. “We have a much higher reliability level out of our new Cisco equipment, and we simply are not making the support calls that we made before. But if we need to, it is handled quickly and efficiently.”

Mearns is looking forward to telling others about Cisco Unified Communications, including partner agencies that the County Workforce works with, such as county employment development, rehabilitation services, and other agencies providing services to people who may be challenged in finding employment.

“With budget cuts, resources everywhere are scarce,” says Mearns. “Our Cisco solution will enable us to look at ways of providing communication to agencies that remotely counsel people at their facility, even though they are not on my direct network. Our agency works every day to help people better their lives, and with our improved communication from Cisco, we can reach our farther and faster and help more people.”

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