



Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Professional services—Software engineering

Customer Profile

RealPage, based in Carrollton, Texas, provides software products and services for multifamily property management firms. The company has more than 1,000 employees.

Business Situation

When RealPage found that replacing its outdated voice-mail system would cost it U.S.\$60,000, it decided to look for a more efficient solution that included e-mail, voice, and conferencing capabilities.

Solution

With help from The VIA Group, RealPage deployed a unified communications solution based on Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007 R2 and Jabra headsets.

Benefits

- Increased communications efficiency
- Projected cost savings
- High adoption and scalability
- Accelerated deployment
- Minimized risks

Company Taps Strengths of Microsoft Partners and Cuts Costs with Unified Communications

“The combination of the Microsoft technology and the partnership between The VIA Group and GN Netcom has reduced our costs and given us effective unified communications.”

Joe McCorkle, Director of Information Technology, RealPage

Texas-based RealPage, a leading provider of on-demand software and services to the multifamily industry, serves more than 3,000 customers. When RealPage discovered it would cost more than U.S.\$60,000 to replace its aging voice-mail system, the company sought a more comprehensive communications solution that included e-mail, voice, and conferencing features. Working with Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner The VIA Group, RealPage deployed a solution based on Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2, along with Jabra headsets from GN Netcom. As a result, RealPage gained an efficient unified communications solution that is expected to deliver considerable cost savings. And, by deploying a joint solution from Microsoft partners, RealPage accelerated the deployment and minimized the risks of adopting a new communications solution.





Microsoft Office System
Customer Solution Case Study



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Situation

RealPage provides software-as-a-service solutions for the multifamily property management industry. Its customers range from small firms that manage only one or two properties to corporations that own and operate hundreds of properties.

RealPage provides six on-demand solutions for its customers: (1) OneSite property management systems that automate the leasing, renting, management, and accounting of conventional, affordable, tax credit, student housing, and military properties; (2) CrossFire sales and marketing systems that boost occupancy and build retention; (3) YieldStar asset optimization systems that maximize asset valuation and investment return; (4) Velocity utility management systems that accelerate payments for resident charges; (5) LeasingDesk risk mitigation systems that reduce a community's exposure to risk and liability; and (6) OpsTechnology spend management systems that help owners manage and reduce operating expenses.

The company has more than 1,000 employees, mostly at its Texas headquarters, but also at its branch offices in the United States and its software development office in India. Employees frequently need to communicate on software development, customer issues, and account management.

In 2007, the RealPage IT department began to consider replacing its aging voice-mail system. But it faced a critical issue: “Replacing the old voice-mail system from our existing vendor was going to cost about \$60,000 for purchasing and support,” says Joe McCorkle, Director of Information Technology for RealPage.

In addition, the company sought more efficient communications that included integrated e-mail and conferencing to

address the growing costs associated with employee travel to sales and board meetings.

Solution

RealPage turned to The VIA Group, an IT consulting and engineering group and Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner, to help it find a solution to its communications issues. The VIA Group has been involved in voice and data convergence since 1997, and it is familiar with both telephony and IT infrastructures. The company offers a family of services—Discover, Design, Deploy, and Support—which cover virtually every IT infrastructure need.

The VIA Group maintains a close relationship with several other Microsoft partners, including Microsoft Gold Certified Partner GN Netcom, a Danish manufacturer whose Jabra headsets are sold in 70 countries. David Carswell, Sr., President of The VIA Group, explains the company view of its partnerships. “Some companies offer only one part of a solution, but we think about which partners we can involve to deliver a comprehensive solution,” he says. “We see our expertise as the ‘glue’ that holds everything together and makes everything interoperable for the customer. We pull expertise from our different business partners and put it all together.”

So when The VIA Group was approached by RealPage, it identified the company's needs and then developed an approach to meet them before deploying a unified communications solution based on Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2 and the Microsoft Office Communicator 2007 R2 client.

The VIA Group also deployed Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 with Unified Messaging to give users the ability to listen to and retrieve voice-mail messages from their Microsoft Office Outlook® 2007 messaging

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and collaboration client, and to use their phones to manage their Office Outlook 2007 e-mail and calendars.

During the deployment, The VIA Group recommended plug-and-play Jabra USB headsets from GN Netcom. The headsets are *Optimized for Microsoft Office Communicator* to provide enhanced voice clarity, which is lacking in software-based phones.

RealPage tried six different headset models for a couple of weeks. “With the help of The VIA Group, we were able to select ones that were best for each specific role,” says McCorkle.

For example, customer-service agents need to work from their desktop computers, so RealPage gave them dual-ear Jabra USB headsets with noise-canceling features. For other employees, such as those in sales, RealPage selected wireless headsets so they could work on projects as they talked on the phone. For remote salespeople, the company chose a headset that can be plugged into a phone or a computer by swapping a cable. Other salespeople chose Bluetooth headsets, so they can talk while having their hands free to do paperwork or drive.

In addition to deploying integrated e-mail and VoIP communications, The VIA Group introduced RealPage to Microsoft RoundTable™ conferencing and collaboration devices, which include a 360-degree camera for video conferencing and software that tracks the active speaker in real time. RealPage then subscribed to a monthly plan for Microsoft Office Live Meeting, so it could hold conferences over the Web.

The solution was deployed in phases beginning in early 2008. “The deployment has gone smoothly and we’ve been able to easily add users,” says McCorkle.

Benefits

RealPage has gained significantly from its unified communications solution. With the help of The VIA Group and GN Netcom, it has achieved more efficient communications that have resulted in dramatic cost savings and an expectation of increased profits. The company expects to begin realizing more financial benefits in 2009.

RealPage accelerated its deployment and reduced the risks of implementing its new solution by drawing on the strengths of the Microsoft partners. “The combination of the Microsoft technology and the partnership between The VIA Group and GN Netcom has reduced our costs and given us effective unified communications,” says McCorkle.

Increased Communications Efficiency

RealPage has significantly streamlined its communications. “Because Office Communications Server 2007 R2, Exchange Server 2007, and the related technologies are all integrated seamlessly, employees can communicate faster, so they get more done in less time,” says McCorkle. “We can also communicate more effectively with clients.” That’s especially true with premier clients who test early versions of the company’s products. “By using instant messaging, we can get rapid feedback and make adjustments to our products virtually in real time.”

Presence awareness has especially contributed to efficiency. “We have all but eliminated needless calls and waiting for e-mail responses, because employees know when colleagues are available,” says McCorkle.

McCorkle notes that the IT department, which has 42 employees located in various buildings at the Texas headquarters, can now conduct engineering discussions more efficiently, too. “With the Office

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Communicator 2007 R2 client, it's very easy to initiate a conference call to bring multiple people in to address a specific question. And while that's going on, maybe someone on the call is simultaneously having an instant messaging chat session on a PC—it's very easy to multitask,” he says.

Multitasking has also improved considerably with the use of Jabra headsets. Employees who now have their hands free can make data entries, send e-mail messages, or perform other tasks while they are on the phone.

The Microsoft technology has also reduced the number of e-mail messages. “With instant messaging—which the IT department employees now use for quick questions—my e-mail is reduced by about 25 percent,” says McCorkle. “And when I'm in my e-mail, I can use Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging to listen to voice mail without having to dial a phone.”

Projected Cost Savings

RealPage expects travel costs to decline with the use of Microsoft RoundTable and Office Live Meeting. “The return on investment for Microsoft RoundTable is one trip,” says McCorkle. “We used to take several employees on trips for sales presentations, but now most can participate by Web conferencing.” Costs for regularly scheduled meetings are also projected to fall. For example, instead of bringing all salespeople to headquarters, the monthly meetings now can take place over the Web.

RealPage plans to have Office Communications Server 2007 R2 fully deployed to its entire sales force by the middle of 2009, which, in turn, should increase efficiency and selling opportunities.

High Adoption and Flexibility

McCorkle says the Microsoft unified communications solution has been enthusiastically adopted at all levels of the company by both in-office personnel and telecommuters. “We have some executives who travel a lot and some who have families that live quite a distance from our headquarters,” McCorkle says. “They've become very enthusiastic adopters of this new technology. The Jabra headsets provide so much flexibility that one of our top executives asked us to remove his old phone from his office.”

RealPage believes the Jabra headsets were critical to user adoption. “Voice quality and comfort are essential to how readily a unified communications solution is adopted,” says McCorkle. “Our employees find that the Jabra headsets provide both of those qualities, so they are quite satisfied.”

McCorkle adds, “Employees appreciate the mobility of their wireless headsets and how much more they can get done.” Users who once were confined to their desks when taking calls can now get up and go down the hall to the copier and continue with their calls.

With the flexibility of its unified communications solution based on Office Communications Server 2007 R2, RealPage can easily add users and extend the solution further in the future. The solution has also led the company to look at new ways it can use the technology for its customers.

Accelerated Deployment

By using The VIA Group, RealPage was able to deploy a joint solution far faster than it could on its own. “We have other strategic projects to work on, and having The VIA Group handle the deployment of Office Communications Server 2007 R2 freed our IT staff for other work,” says McCorkle. “It also meant we

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For more information about The VIA Group products and services, call (800) 807-8854 or visit the Web site at: www.theVIAGroup.com

For more information about GN Netcom products and services, call (800) 826-4656, extension 6606 or visit the Web site at: www.jabra.com/microsoft

For more information about RealPage products and services, call (877) 325-7243 or visit the Web site at: www.realpage.com

could quickly get up to speed, because The VIA Group consultants had handled so many similar deployments in the past. And they saved us time, because we did not have to go out and research the entire market for headsets and complementary technology. That expertise meant a lot.”

Minimized Risks

“The close relationship between The VIA Group and GN Netcom helped us considerably,” says McCorkle. “We didn’t know which headsets to buy, but because The VIA Group consultants know a lot of technologies, we knew we could trust their recommendations for the Jabra headsets. We did not have to take a chance on technologies that might not work.”

Solid Foundation

RealPage believes it has a solution that will serve it well both now and in the future. “We see the unified communications market as having a big future in our industry, and we think the Microsoft technology and Microsoft partners will play a central role,” McCorkle says. “By adding their own services and products, Microsoft partners extend the value of the Microsoft technology. We’re excited about the possibilities that lie ahead for us and our customers through these strong partnerships.”

Microsoft Office System

The Microsoft Office system is the business world’s chosen environment for information work, providing the programs, servers, and services that help you succeed by transforming information into impact.

For more information about the Microsoft Office system, go to: www.microsoft.com/office

Software and Services

- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2
 - Microsoft Office Communicator 2007 R2
 - Microsoft Office Live Meeting
 - Microsoft Office Outlook 2007
- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Microsoft Exchange Server 2007

Hardware

- Jabra USB headsets *Optimized for Microsoft Office Communicator*
- Microsoft RoundTable devices

Partners

- GN Netcom
- The VIA Group