EMIT DISCOVERS THE POWER OF ASTERISK

CASE STUDY   **ASTERISK**

OVERVIEW

It's a challenge many businesses face — the company is growing rapidly but the company's business telecommunications system is lagging behind. One thing is clear, businesses today are looking for flexibility and versatility in their next telecom system. Many companies are finding that in order to expand, they must replace an old digital or outdated analog phone system with a VoIP solution that easily integrates with existing software and hardware, and steadily moves the company towards a long-term Unified Communications (UC) platform that also saves them money. Asterisk, a free Open Source business communications platform sponsored by Digium, provides that needed flexibility and adaptability. Emit, Inc., an engineering firm located in Nashville, Tennessee was about to discover the power of Asterisk.

Asterisk Provides Engineering Firm an Expandable Telephony Solution and Thousands in Monthly Cost Savings

With a second location in Austin, Texas, Emit had grown to 35 employees. The company installs and maintains conveyor systems primarily for distribution facilities worldwide, but when Brian Harris, their used equipment sales manager attempted to add extension modules to their digital Avaya IP Office phone system, there wasn't enough spots for new phones or sufficient extension modules available.

Emit, Inc. Finds an Answer in the Twitter World

"I wasn't sure what to do. A new phone system was not in the CAPEX budget and we didn't want the monthly expense of a hosted solution," Harris says. "So I sent out a Tweet seeking help and advice from the Twitter universe." His answer came from Jamie Stapleton @jastapleton, the president of Computer Business Solutions, Inc. (CBSI) in Richmond, Virginia. Stapleton offered a number of solutions, all involving the implementation of Asterisk.

By using a combination of Open Source Asterisk software with Digium hardware, technicians can create business phone systems and other communications applications. Asterisk is an economical platform for building a PBX telephony system, or anything from VoIP gateways and IVR servers, to call centers and UC suites.

Harris notes that the 12-year-old Avaya system was not utilizing the benefits of VoIP, but instead, ran off two T1 copper phone lines (time-division multiplexing or TDM lines) costing about $800 a month. As it turned out, the limitations of the Avaya phone system was compounded by the restrictions of TDM, the main reason why Harris couldn't add expansion modules.

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Problem Solved, Money Saved

With Stapleton in Virginia, Harris and his IT team voluntarily took the project forward themselves, with remote backup from CBSI when needed. "Using Digium cards, we installed the Asterisk system on an old PC," Harris explains. "Jamie suggested we also install a TE820 Octal-Span Digital Card because it is a cost-effective way to increase performance." Recently released by Digium, the TE820 offers the highest single-card port density available for use with Asterisk.

Emit then replaced the Avaya with FreePBX, a user-friendly graphical user interface (GUI) that controls and manages the Asterisk software. "It was an economical but applicable way to replace the Avaya with VoIP, and it saved us thousands of dollars on a new system," Harris says. Installing Asterisk was just the beginning of the savings Emit would enjoy.

They found a way to help Emit save the $800 a month by upgrading and replacing the T1s with IP-based SIP Trunks provided by NetVortex for only $120 a month. NetVortex helps companies migrate their digital communication services to VoIP, while managing those services easily and effectively, something that allowed Emit to drop the costly, outdated copper phone lines. "We can now answer the phones through Plantronic softphones and headsets sitting in front of a computer interface," Harris says. Emit also uses Polycom conference phones, all running off Asterisk. "We are no longer limited in how many phones we can add here in Nashville or in Austin."

CBSI's Asterisk solutions and support led to Emit's acquiring a number of additional items like a firewall, storage systems including a redundancy backup and cold spare, and converged phones for the Austin location. According to Harris, "Between the cold spare, additional upgrades, converting to VoIP, and internal cost savings, we are saving well over $1,000 a month. It took less than a month to buy the equipment and make all the changes. The whole new system is highly reliable. I'd say mission accomplished!"

digium®
The Asterisk Company

Digium Headquarters
445 Jan Davis Drive NW
Huntsville, AL 35806 - USA
Phone: +1 256-428-6000
Fax: +1 256-864-0464
www.digium.com
www.digium.com/switchvox