VERTEKS
CONNECTION

MAY/JUNE 2012

VERTEKS
VOICE & DATA
NETWORKS

Everything IT

For MFM Industries, Verteks is a one-stop resource for IT advice, expert services and comprehensive support.

Cat litter is not a very glamorous product — most pet owners probably take it for granted. But it filled a real need when it was first introduced in 1947 by enabling cat lovers to keep their feline friends indoors. Today it is a $1 billion industry, and the core business of MFM Industries in Lowell, Fla.

MFM manufactures private-label cat litter for grocery stores, dollar stores and pet stores nationwide. The company has been in business since 1964 and employs 75 people at its Lowell plant and Ocala corporate office.

None of those employees is focused on information technology. Instead, the company relies on Verteks Consulting for IT consulting, implementation and support. For more than a decade, Verteks has served as MFM's trusted advisor and expert resource for its voice and data needs.

"We do not have IT staff — Verteks is our IT staff," said Ann Chaffin, Business Development Director,

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MFM Industries. “They have completed a number of projects for us over the years, and have handled all of our computer and phone system issues. We trust them because they are very knowledgeable and keep our best interests at heart.”

The Verteks team has up-to-date expertise spanning the latest server and network technologies, IP communications systems and much more. Verteks also offers a comprehensive managed services program that helps to minimize system downtime and smooth out IT costs. Thanks to Verteks, MFM can focus on the business of manufacturing cat litter and not worry about IT issues.

Tough Environment

Like 95 percent of all cat litters, MFM’s products are made of clay, a naturally occurring substance composed of aluminum silicates and minerals. Clay is found 30 to 40 feet below the earth’s surface. Earth movers scoop raw clay from open pits and transport it to the plant, where it is loaded onto conveyor belts and spilled into giant crushers. Another conveyor belt feeds the clay into a kiln, where it is baked at temperatures as high as 2000°F. Lifters tumble the clay as it bakes then feed it into a second crusher that crumbles it to its final consistency.

It’s a dirty business, as one can well imagine, and it takes its toll on the electronic equipment in MFM’s plant facility. MFM needed a reliable source for replacing any phone sets that wore out or became damaged in the rough environment.

MFM had purchased a 3Com phone system at the end of 2006. But when HP acquired 3Com in 2010, the 3Com phones became obsolete. It was getting harder and harder for MFM to find refurbished phones for its plant.

“We were in the process of getting new servers and decided to do the whole thing — new phones, new servers, everything,” Chaffin said. “We asked Verteks to help us select the phone system for our business, and they recommended ShoreTel.”

The Right Solution

The ShoreTel IP Communications solution is a feature-rich system that is cost-efficient and easy to administer. ShoreTel's distributed architecture is ideal for companies like MFM that span multiple locations because the IP phone system appears and behaves as a single, unified system.

“Verteks used the ShoreTel system to integrate our facilities,” said Chaffin. “Before, we used MPLS to connect our locations so we could dial four digits to reach any extension. But there were two separate phone systems — one at our corporate office and one at our plant facility. We had to go into each phone system to make changes. Now we have just one phone system, so it’s much easier to maintain.”

The ShoreTel system also provides MFM with a number of productivity-enhancing features. Unified messaging allows users to access voicemail and contacts through Microsoft Outlook, use their calendars to schedule conferences, and control the handling of incoming calls.

“I love this system — particularly the ShoreTel Communicator,” Chaffin said. “You can listen to the voice mails without picking up the handset or using the speaker phone. You can click on ‘call back’ and it will automatically dial the person back. You can go to history and see if you missed calls. It has a lot of great features.

“Verteks is very knowledgeable about the products that they sell, so we relied on them to tell us what phone system we should buy. Plus, they use ShoreTel themselves.”

Doing What’s Needed

Verteks has also implemented the Microsoft Hyper-V virtualization solution, enabling MFM to replace four servers with one. Virtualization saves the cost of maintaining multiple systems. In addition, the virtualized server environment takes up much less space, consumes less power and is much easier to manage.

“We had four big servers in a huge rack, one for our Great Plains accounting software, one for Microsoft Exchange, a data server and a backup server. Now we have just one server for all those systems. It’s condensed down to a much smaller rack,” Chaffin said.

All of this is managed and supported by the experts at Verteks. MFM is taking advantage of Verteks’ managed services program for proactive maintenance and comprehensive support. Verteks monitors MFM’s systems and handles all of the updates and other routine maintenance tasks. When an issue arises, the Verteks team can generally take care of it remotely for faster response. If necessary, they will promptly go on site to resolve the problem.

“Because the users in our plant facility log in through terminal services, it’s easy for Verteks to correct any issues remotely,” said Chaffin. “Verteks is very responsive and always does whatever is needed to get us up and running quickly. They’re a great company.”

News Briefs

Government Going Mobile

Federal agencies looking to become more efficient have embraced mobile computing. More than half of federal employees surveyed recently report they use at least one mobile device at work — many of those using personal devices to accomplish work-related tasks. Nearly all of the 414 federal employees and IT staff surveyed say mobile computing makes them more productive and improves service to their constituents, according to the report from CDW Government LLC (CDW-G).

Nearly all the federal IT professionals (99 percent) said they have deployed mobile devices to their agency workforce, and 62 percent said their agencies allow employees to use personal devices for work.

"Mobility is the 'new normal' for federal employees," said Bob Kirby, vice president of federal government for CDW-G. "Employees increasingly expect to be able to work anywhere and at any time. Agencies responded first by deploying mobile devices, and now they are enabling use of personal devices."

Smartphones Surpass PC Shipments

Total global shipments of smartphones exceeded those of client PCs, including tablets, in 2011, according to a recent report from Canalys, an IT analyst firm that tracks smartphone markets. According to the report, approximately 488 million smartphones shipped worldwide in 2011, compared to 415 million client PCs.

"In the space of a few years, smartphones have grown from being a niche product segment at the high-end of the mobile phone market to becoming a truly mass-market proposition," said Chris Jones, Canalys VP and Principal Analyst. "The greater availability of smartphones at lower price points has helped tremendously, but there has been a driving trend of increasing consumer appetite for Internet browsing, content consumption and engaging with apps and services on mobile devices."

However, Canalys expects to see smart phone market growth slow in 2012 as vendors exercise greater cost control and discipline, and put more focus on profitability. Notably, even vendors that have focused on conquering the low end of the market with aggressive pricing, such as Huawei, ZTE and LG, are now placing greater attention on the higher tiers. Flagship models aimed at raising selling prices and improving margins will feature more heavily this year.

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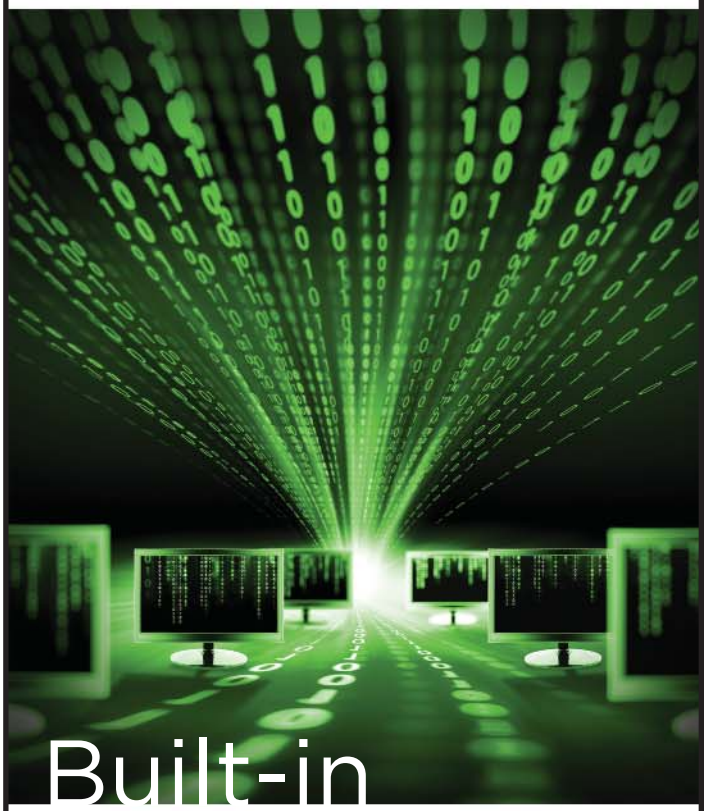

Built-in Virtualization

Virtualization technology plays an increasingly critical role at all levels of IT, from the desktop to the datacenter. To help customers adopt virtualization easily, Microsoft has developed a next-generation server virtualization solution as a feature of Microsoft® Windows Server® 2008. Hyper-VTM is a virtualization platform that provides reliable and scalable platform capabilities along with a single set of integrated management tools to manage both physical and virtual resources. In addition, Microsoft and its partner ecosystem provide comprehensive support that enables you to deploy applications on Microsoft's virtualization platform with confidence and peace of mind.

Windows Server Hyper-V

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VoIP Going Mobile

Employee mobility and BYOD programs are driving business mobile VoIP adoption.

Voice over IP (VoIP) has evolved to become the foundation of business communications across industry sectors. Organizations of all sizes are continuing to replace traditional PBXs with IP-based phone systems, as evinced by the revenue split reported by Infonetics Research: Hybrid IP-PBXs continue to dominate the PBX market, making up nearly two-thirds of global revenue. Pure IP-PBXs continue to grow as a proportion of the overall market, making up nearly one-third now and growing. Traditional PBXs, despite sporadic growth spurts, continue to decline overall.

IP-PBXs are popular because they deliver a host of business benefits, including cost savings, flexibility, simplified administration, advanced features and more. Increasingly, the benefits that IP-based communications deliver are being extended to mobile devices through mobile VoIP. According to technology research and consulting firm In-Stat, the number of business mobile VoIP users will increase tenfold over the next five years, with implementation both enterprise- and individual-driven.

"There are several reasons that adoption of mobile VoIP makes sense," said In-Stat Senior Analyst Amy Cravens. "Some of these include the ability to take the desktop phone experience with you, the ability to utilize the benefits of IP-based communication features, a cheaper international long-distance cost, an easy implementation path and better indoor coverage where cell phone reception has historically been poor."

Business Drivers

Mobile VoIP is an extension of enterprise IP communications that enables VoIP calls to be placed over a cellular data or Wi-Fi network from a mobile device. Voice traffic travels over the available broadband connection, whether that connection is 3G, EDGE, Wi-Fi or GPRS.

Like fixed VoIP, mobile VoIP is being adopted in both the consumer and business segments, but has only recently begun to be implemented in the business environment. Yet growth rates are strong and In-Stat predicts that business use will have grown to nearly 83 million lines/seats by 2015. Ultimately, IP-PBX users will account for the majority of business mobile VoIP usage.

Mobile VoIP is increasingly popular because it combines IP desk phone functionality with the flexibility of smartphones. Mobile VoIP empowers organizations to create a more productive, responsive and accessible workforce by extending the full power of an IP desk phone and unified communications (UC) capabilities to the mobile user. Dual persona features ensure easy separation of personal and business identities on a single mobile device. Seamless and automatic selection of the best available network — Wi-Fi or cellular — enables users to communicate from anywhere.

Mobile VoIP also enables enterprises to reduce their overall telecom costs by eliminating international roaming and direct dial costs on mobile devices. It also allows organizations to rightsize the number of IP desk phones that are purchased and maintained.

Eliminating the Chaos of BYOD

Mobility is not the only factor driving mobile VoIP adoption. As the workforce becomes younger and more tech-savvy, employees continue to introduce consumer tools and services into the enterprise — with and without the blessing of IT departments. Experts call this the "consumerization" of IT and expect it to dramatically alter the way businesses choose, use and manage technology. The consumerization of IT is driving the "bring your own device" (BYOD) revolution, in which employees use personally owned devices for work.

Mobile VoIP solutions that integrate smartphones and tablets with leading IP-PBX systems extend corporate communication applications to employee-owned devices, reducing support burdens. IT can empower users with enterprise UC on the smartphones they love, leveraging the IP-PBX platform that they already have — all while reducing costs and securing enterprise communications.

"We are hearing a lot from clients looking for advice around BYOD, and we see this as a big issue for enterprises, in addition to the efficiency and productivity benefits that mobile devices bring. Enterprises should look to a solution that supports a broad range of leading smartphones and tablets, as the devices being used at work are not always company owned. Enterprises will prefer a solution that is part of their existing IP-PBX and UC system or works with the existing system, therefore avoiding upgrades or replacement of their existing infrastructure," said Steve Blood, vice president of research at Gartner.

Mobile VoIP solutions that integrate smartphones and tablets with leading IP-PBX systems extend corporate communication applications to employee-owned devices, reducing support burdens.

Cost Savings and More

Mobile VoIP solutions also deliver some of the classic benefits associated with VoIP, including reduced costs and ease of administration. With software that switches networks intelligently and automatically between wireless and cellular for the best option available at any given moment, the latest mobile VoIP solutions can dramatically reduce international roaming and direct dial charges on smartphones. In fact, mobile VoIP can help organizations reduce their mobile phone bills by up to 70 percent on a broad range of smartphones.

Mobile VoIP empowers IT to manage enterprise communications in a BYOD environment in a way that reduces security risks without hindering productivity. The latest mobile VoIP solutions can ease the workload of IT staff by bringing enterprise IP-PBXs, UC systems and a plethora of mobile device platforms within a single management interface.

As workers increasingly rely upon their own mobile devices for communications, enterprise VoIP and UC platforms need to be mobilized and infused with context such as presence and location information — anywhere and anytime. Mobile VoIP solutions provide the infrastructure to seamlessly extend desk phone functionality to smartphones and other devices. Mobile VoIP enables mobile workers to take advantage of the benefits of IP-based communications, while allowing organizations to reduce costs and better manage BYOD programs.

Managed Security Services in Demand

Increased connectivity, growing security risks and budget constraints are causing more organizations to turn to managed security services.

While the modern interconnected world brings numerous advantages, it also brings in its fair share of challenges and perils. Today, cybercrime costs society more than $1 trillion, with billions of dollars stolen from small, midsize and large enterprises. The growing sophistication of security attacks makes it increasingly difficult for organizations to guard against these risks.

These challenges have provided a fertile environment for IT security services. Given the increase in cyber threats and rise in the number of network security breaches around the globe, organizations are keenly focused on security issues. At the same time, tough economic conditions are causing organizations to outsource many IT functions. Managed security services (MSS) help increase security without breaking the budget.

As a result, Global Industry Analysts (GIA) expects the worldwide MSS market to reach $11.2 billion by 2017. Growth will be primarily driven by rapid expansion of the Internet, intranets and virtual private networks (VPNs), the proliferation of Internet-connected devices such as PCs, laptops and smartphones, the rise in the volume of confidential B2B and B2C transactions, and growing concerns over network security.

Risks and Rewards

In the past, few organizations would seek outsourced security solutions for fear that they would have to give away the keys to the kingdom. Today, organizations are becoming less fearful of handing over sensitive information to a qualified MSS provider.

That's because hackers continue to innovate and refine their attacks, making it increasingly difficult and expensive for organizations to maintain robust network security. Rather than continually increasing their security budgets, organizations are seeking more cost-effective security solutions as their internal resources for dealing with security threats fall short.

The cost benefits of outsourcing IT security functions cannot be underestimated, especially against a backdrop of "doing more with less." Outsourcing to an MSSP frees organizations from making investments in security appliances, software and monitoring, and maintaining in-house security skill sets. MSSPs are able to leverage economies of scale to reduce the cost of comprehensive network security.

Security threats are increasingly targeting small to midsize businesses (SMBs), bringing opportunities in the SMB sector into the spotlight. Lower upfront investments and cost reduction benefits will continue to drive the adoption of MSS in this sector, expanding the market's revenue-generating potential, GIA says.

Growth in the MSS market is also being driven by regulatory requirements for data security. Companies are required to comply with a growing body of regulations designed to protect against risks to sensitive data, or else face financial and punitive consequences. MSS solutions help to relieve regulatory compliance pressures cost-effectively.

Meeting Today's Challenges

The MSS market is forecast to expand from managing and maintaining firewalls and antivirus solutions to include comprehensive crisis management programs. Enterprises are demanding security services that can ensure quick recovery and provide continued services in the aftermath of a large-scale disruption, whether due to natural calamities, terrorist activities or business failure.

The MSS industry is also witnessing a shift in technology toward intrusion

prevention systems (IPSs) from conventional intrusion detection systems (IDSs), suggesting that MSSPs and their customers are inclined toward preventive measures in battling threats such as pharming, phishing, phlooding and distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks. With more businesses looking to safeguard their networks and with new legislation on information security expected, the market for MSS is poised to benefit, according to GIA.

Dependence on the expertise of MSSPs for process automation, documentation, and extensive incident reporting needs, among other tasks, is expected to only grow stronger in the future. In this regard, managed security event correlation (SEC) systems, also known as security incident and event management (SIEM), or security information management (SIM), represents a lucrative market offering.

Going Mobile

Managed services for mobile security are poised to boost MSS revenue, given the spiraling use of smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices for business functions. Mobile networks are currently at their tipping point with exploding data traffic triggering the collapse of mobile network operators' traditional "walled garden" approach. Mobile networks are now migrating toward the concept of "open garden" wherein customers are given unhindered access to all available services and content.

As cellular network giants throw open their networks to enable interoperability between proprietary network domains, the open networks concept presents potential risk avenues from a security and privacy perspective. As proprietary network perimeters dissolve, security issues will rise in importance. Managed security services for mobile devices and mobile network operators/service providers therefore stand to gain in the immediate future, according to GIA.

The best MSSPs offer a broad range of services to meet the security needs of a wide variety of companies, and have multiple operations centers running around the clock in order to achieve continuous management and monitoring. The best MSSPs also employ security specialists with certified expertise across a broad range of security products from a variety of vendors, giving them the freedom to select best-of-breed solutions.

Outsourcing security to an MSSP allows organizations to improve security, comply with regulations, reduce costs and concentrate on core business processes. As security challenges and regulatory mandates continue to grow unabated, managed security services become increasingly attractive.

Unlike many other consulting firms, Verteks has developed unmatched expertise in several critical areas, which allows us to serve as a central source for a broad range of high-quality solutions to complex IT issues. Contact us today and let us show you how we can help you simplify your business with technology.

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