

Home Improvement Business Leverages Technology to Compete with Global Companies



Jerry's Home Improvement Center utilizes Cisco solutions from Obsidian Technologies to successfully compete with global businesses.

Business Challenge

In today's world of global, "big box" home improvement stores such as Lowe's and Home Depot, how does the small, locally-owned store compete? For Jerry's Home Improvement Center (Jerry's) in Eugene, Oregon, one answer lies in deploying world-class technology.

Jerry's is a retailer of home improvement and construction products. With a main store and headquarters in Eugene, Oregon, and a second retail store that opened in nearby Springfield in 2003, it is a large independent retailer of home improvement products, providing a wide range of goods and services for both professionals and do-it-yourself consumers. In order for Jerry's, a local retailer, to compete with the big, global home improvement retailers, it needs to provide great customer service and competitive pricing. To accomplish this, Jerry's relies heavily on its IT investments.

Following the successful implementation of Cisco® networking and IP telephony at the Springfield retail location, Jerry's recently replaced its legacy PBX at the Headquarters and main retail store location in Eugene. Like the Springfield site, the main store's network would need to support multiple systems. The existing Point-of-Sale (PoS) system authorizes and handles live credit card, debit card, and gift card transactions and is accessed via wireless handheld devices and PC-based checkout stations. The network would also need to support corporate applications such as printing, file sharing, Microsoft Office and Outlook applications. The main store would also require an IP telephony solution that would both support contact center capabilities with wireless handsets for employees working the store floor, and integrate with the existing Bogen paging solution in place at the headquarters and main store in Eugene.

Michael Eldridge, IT director for Jerry's Home Improvement Center, chose to work with Cisco® Premier Certified Partner Obsidian Technologies, also located in Eugene. A Cisco Unified Communications specialized partner since 1999, Obsidian Technologies provides consultation, design, implementation, and support services for turnkey IP telephony, wireless local area network (WLAN), and security solutions for commercial and public sector clients in Oregon and Washington.

Eldridge felt that Obsidian, as a Cisco SMB Select Partner with a Cisco specialization in IP Communications, had the unique combination of market and technical knowledge that he was looking for as demonstrated by Obsidian Technologies' successful design, deployment and support of the Springfield solution in 2003.

"Michael is always seeking ways to leverage technology to enhance that personal touch with customers that is so critical to Jerry's business," says Tony Foy, vice president of Obsidian Technologies. "His department supports every customer interaction, from incoming phone calls to purchasing an item at a register. The technology is all behind the scenes, but at the same time it is absolutely customer-centric."

Executive Summary

Jerry's Home Improvement Center

- Eugene, Oregon
- 550+ Employees

Industry

- Construction/Home Improvement Retail

Business Challenge

- Enhance personal touch with customers and improve their experiences
- Compete effectively with global, big-box hardware and home improvement chains

Network Solution

- Converged, intelligent network
- Unified Communications and voice mobility solutions

Business Value

- Established high level of personal customer contact
- Enhanced ability to successfully compete with large chain stores

Network Solution

In choosing the network solution, Eldridge stayed focused on three goals that the solution had to provide: bringing the company's technology into the future; meeting customer needs successfully, and keeping Jerry's competitive in the market.

With those goals in mind, Obsidian Technologies proposed a Cisco Unified Communications solution featuring:

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager call-processing software
- Cisco Unity for integrated voice messaging
- Cisco Unified Contact Center Express

Cisco Unified Communications would be built upon infrastructure provided by:

- Cisco Catalyst® 3750 and 3560 switches with Power over Ethernet (POE)
- Cisco ISR 2800 Series router and voice gateways, providing point-to-point WAN with QoS, and Voice T1 PRI voice termination
- Cisco Voice Gateway 248 to support faxing, paging integration, and other analog devices
- Cisco Unified Wireless Solution

When comparing this proposal to a competing proposal from Avaya, Eldridge found that the Cisco solution recommended by Obsidian was superior because it provided a fully integrated, turnkey solution; Cisco Unified Contact Center Express provided more flexibility and more features; and the entire solution provided a single system integrator to support network and telephony requirements.

"The single-vendor, single-integrator part of the solution was really key," says Eldridge. "In addition to the world-class Cisco technology, the Obsidian proposal allows us to have a single point of contact for the entire network. The solution delivers IP telephony and all of our networking needs, and it supports and manages our PoS traffic, voice, and data with one converged solution. That is very powerful. I did not want to deal with incompatibilities and the problems that you can have with different vendor solutions patched together."

Business Results

With a successful flash-cut from the existing legacy PBX to the new IP Communication solution, the Headquarters and main store site of Jerry's Home Improvement Center, Eldridge could not be more pleased with the results.

"Our Cisco solution from Obsidian Technologies has provided Jerry's with better visibility for our main operator, better call queuing and routing, and greater mobility and flexibility for sales floor agents," says Eldridge. "All of these things mean a better experience for our customers."

With over 200,000 square feet between the two locations, Jerry's Home Improvement Center is reaping the benefits of the Cisco network and the wireless communications. The centralized wireless solution allows Eldridge's staff to manage multiple business metrics while helping ensure that customer calls are taken in a timely fashion.



"They are using the system as a kind of hybrid call center solution," says Foy. "Calls come into an operator, and they send the call to the appropriate department. The company philosophy is one of personal contact, so it was important that a person, not an automated voice, answer every call quickly. It really combines the best of both worlds: a high level of personal touch before the second ring, then quick and accurate call distribution to the best person to help the caller." If that person is working the floor, they take the call on their Cisco Unified Wireless IP Phone 7920. The wireless component allows sales people working the floor to take a call and check on stock or an order status without losing contact with the customer. Because the new Cisco network also supports Jerry's inventory count, sales team members can check for available inventory or order status without putting the caller on hold.

The reporting features of Cisco Unified Communications show Eldridge and the retail operations management staff where the calls are going, how long callers have been waiting, and if calls are dropped. The company leverages this reporting information to make sure that they are staffed appropriately.

The network also manages Jerry's PoS system, which is critical to business and to customer service. A separate portion of the network has been cordoned off so that PoS traffic always takes priority. That means that customer purchases are quick and efficient whether customers are using cash, a credit card, a debit card, or a gift card.

Next Steps

The implementation of a Cisco network and Cisco Unified Communications by Obsidian Technologies at Jerry's was so successful that Eldridge would like to further leverage his intelligent network to support video.

"Although some people may feel that technology pushes people away, we are using technology to enhance our personal touch with our customers," says Eldridge. "The level of service enabled by our Cisco network helps us effectively compete with global, big-box stores."