

CASE STUDY

Ascential UC & Contact Centre

ASCENTIAL

Events and media business, Ascential increased the efficiency of its distributed workforce with a unified communications and contact centre solution from Modern Networks.

About Ascential

In 2015, the Top Right Group rebranded to become Ascential and focus on Exhibitions, Festivals and Information Services. Today, Ascential plc is a global business-to-business media company listed on the London Stock Exchange. Ascential is home to trusted world-class events and information services that inform and connect business professionals in 150 countries around the globe. Ascential connects and informs people across a range of industries, including fashion and creative, retail, advertising, construction, financial and education technology and e-commerce. The company's focused portfolio of premium brands includes the prestigious Cannes Lions festival for the branded communications industry, the world's premier payments and financial services congress Money20/20, Spring Fair/Autumn Fair, the global fashion trend forecasting service WGSN, environmental risk data

business Groundsure, e-commerce analytics provider One Click Retail and advisory and business services firm, MediaLink.

The Challenge

The company operated as a single entity, and all 1200 London-based employees worked in one office building. "To remain competitive, we had to make sure that each business unit received the resources and attention it needed to succeed," says Sean Harley, group IT director for Ascential. The company embarked on a bold business transformation project, splitting the company into four independent business units. Each would have its own operating identity, headquarters, and executive team.

The IT team, which remained centralised, viewed the move to new buildings as an opportunity to introduce more flexible ways of working. "We wanted to give employees the tools to work from anywhere, including any office, a coffee shop, the train, or home," says Harley. Enabling employees to work from any available desk would reduce real estate costs. Many employees travel frequently, so providing one desk for each employee is an unnecessary use of space.

To make the hot-desking arrangement work, Ascential needed a collaboration application that operated on a variety of laptops, tablets, and smartphones that employees use for work. "We already had a presence and instant messaging application, but it only worked on Windows machines and did not integrate with our voice system," explained Harley. As a result, employees could not click to dial or exchange instant messages with other team members who used a different type of device.

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Our Solution

After evaluating three leading unified communications solutions, Ascential selected Cisco® Unified Communications and Cisco Jabber®, which provides a single, easy-to-use interface for presence, instant messaging, voice, and voice messaging. Modern Networks, a Cisco Premier Partner, provided plan and build services. “Cisco Jabber is the only solution that works on Windows, Mac OS, iOS, and Android devices,” says Harley. “Modern Networks’ delivery capabilities were just as important as the technology because we had a very aggressive timeline to move into the four new offices.”

Modern Networks implemented Cisco Unified Communications Manager centrally, in Ascential’s two London data centres. Other offices need no equipment other than a Cisco Integrated Services Router (ISR). “We moved out of our old offices on a Friday, and the following Monday employees sat down at any unoccupied desk in their new building, connected their laptops, and began making and receiving calls and instant messages with Cisco Jabber,” says Harley.

Today, Ascential’s London workforce can collaborate efficiently from anywhere, using any device. The solutions behind the transformation are:

A single interface for all communications and collaboration applications: All employees use Cisco Jabber for phone calls, presence, and instant messaging. The company has only a few physical phones, most in executive offices. Approximately 60 percent of employees use Cisco Jabber on their Windows laptops, while most of the remainder use Macs. A few IT team members have also begun using Cisco Jabber on their iPhones, iPads, and Android devices, to be ready if Ascential introduces a bring-your-

own-device (BYOD) policy. Ascential chief executive officer already uses Cisco Jabber on an iPad.

In-person collaboration: Employees in three London offices, New York, Hong Kong, and Shanghai can enjoy an in-person collaboration experience from conference rooms with Cisco TelePresence® systems, implemented by Cisco partner Ideal Networks. Employees use Cisco TelePresence for job interviews, spontaneous conversations with teammates, formal team meetings, and investor presentations. “Our fashion-industry teams in London, Hong Kong, and New York have started to replace audio-conferences with Cisco TelePresence sessions,” says Harley. The in-person experience helps make communications more accurate, contributing to better decision-making. Cisco TelePresence is also improving rapport among people on the same teams who previously had never seen each other.

Efficient contact centre operations: Approximately 150 people across the four businesses receive a high volume of phone calls because they work in sales or staff the internal IT helpdesk. Cisco Unified Contact Centre Express intelligently routes inbound calls to the first available agent with the right skills. Agents place and receive calls on Cisco Jabber. Detailed reports show agents’ activity, motivating them to perform at their best. Employees quickly overcame their initial hesitation about using Cisco Jabber instead of a traditional phone. “Everyone talks about Jabber, and credits it with helping them be more productive and able to work from any location,” says Harley. “It’s become a part of our organisational vocabulary, as in ‘I was just on a Jabber call and we came up with a plan’.”

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The Benefits

Cisco Jabber helped Ascential transform to independent business units by simplifying collaboration and lowering real estate costs. "Our internal team had to manage a lot of activities before the move: preparing employees for cultural change, replacing desktops with laptops, implementing next-generation Wi-Fi, and opening new global offices," says Harley. "Through it all, Modern Networks and Cisco acted as trusted advisors to facilitate business transformation."

Enabling Collaboration from Any Device, at Any Desk: Now all employees, not just the employees who use Windows laptops, can collaborate with presence and instant messaging. And enabling employees to work at any desk has also lowered London real estate costs. "One of the business units only needed to provide 301 desks for 365 people," explains Harley. "Replacing traditional phones with Cisco Jabber means employees can work from anywhere." To date, everyone who has needed a desk could readily find one because some workers are visiting customers, traveling, working from home or remote offices, or on vacation.

Increased Contact Centre Efficiency: "A salesperson who needs a manager's approval to close a sale can use presence to see which manager is available, and then just click to send an instant message or bring the manager on the call," explains Harley. "By enabling the right people to collaborate at the right time, Jabber is helping to increase the productivity of our sales teams." In addition, Ascential's sales managers can now view detailed reports from Cisco Unified Contact Centre Express to monitor the productivity of their teams. Sales managers can also listen to live calls to provide coaching, identify training opportunities, and provide sales assistance.

For the IT helpdesk, giving staff members Cisco Jabber to locate experts and obtain quick answers has helped increase the number of incidents that first-line staff can resolve by 30 percent, and accelerated the average time to resolve a helpdesk incident by 50 percent. As a result, satisfaction ratings have increased by 15 percent.

Lowered Voice Costs in Global Enterprise: Thirty-eight percent of the company's telephony traffic flows between offices in different countries. Now, with SIP trunking support in Cisco Unified Communications Manager, international calls travel over multi-protocol label switching (MPLS) network, avoiding high toll costs. "We estimate that SIP trunking has reduced company-wide monthly service provider costs by at least 40 percent. And that's despite connecting from four offices instead of one," says Harley.

Continuous Improvement

Continuing its pursuit of better ways of working, Ascential has taken advantage of more Cisco Jabber capabilities:

Video calling: Employees can now make video calls exactly the same way they make voice calls, and are able to join Cisco TelePresence sessions from their laptops.

Integration with Salesforce.com: The goal was to increase efficiency by enabling employees to view presence information and click to call from within Salesforce. See our Ascential UC & CRM Integration case study.

Mobility: We have provided Cisco Jabber Mobile to all employees to use on their iPads, iPhones, and Android devices.

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In addition, other Ascential sales teams are planning to adopt Cisco Unified Contact Centre Express. Those that want to increase outbound call volumes are considering using a feature that connects the call to the agent only if a person has answered the call.

Technology List

Unified Communications

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager

Collaboration Applications

- Cisco Jabber
- Cisco Unity® Voice Mail
- Cisco Unified Contact Centre Express

TelePresence

- Cisco Video Communication System Expressway
- Cisco TelePresence C20, C40 and MX20 End-points.