

FIRST GUARANTEE MORTGAGE TRADES UP TO SHORETEL

Company scraps sub-par VoIP system for ShoreTel in just 24 hours solving voice quality issues

Challenge:

First Guarantee Mortgage had implemented a VoIP system in hopes of cutting costs and taking advantages of sophisticated features but the deployment quickly went south when the system proved to be unreliable and the voice quality was poor. Just months after that implementation, the mortgage broker looked to cut its losses with a new IP telephony system.

Solution:

The mortgage broker evaluated a number of options, choosing the ShoreTel solution based on scalability, performance capabilities, features, and price. First Guarantee Mortgage had the system up and running within 24 business hours, and immediately saw excellent results.

Benefits:

First Guarantee Mortgage is finding ShoreTel's solution is scalable, reliable, and high-performing. The company has been thrilled with both voice quality and redundancy which has kept the system running even when related components fail. The ShoreTel deployment proved to be a win/win for the company: End users are happy with the system's features such as its integration with Outlook; IT is pleased with its manageability.

The real estate boom has driven the mortgage industry to new heights. But with market success so dependent upon the quality and stability of their communications infrastructures, mortgage companies need to have a system in place that can route a high volume of calls to loan officers, while moving data traffic at a rapid clip. IP telephony offers mortgage brokerages a welcome alternative to the cost and complexity associated with managing separate voice and data networks.

First Guarantee Mortgage, a multi-state mortgage brokerage based in Saratoga Springs, NY, found itself in just that position when it began shopping around for an IP telephony system to replace its aging NEC/Nitsuko telephony system, and take advantage of the fiber network that was already connecting its six sites. The sites were all tied together with T1 lines, but operators often couldn't transfer calls because there was no available phone resource to route the call to the correct person.

Looking to install a manageable, stable IP telephony system, and to eliminate the thousands of dollars in monthly T1 line charges, the mortgage company settled on a small VoIP vendor and in January 2005 set out to implement the IP phone system which would support more than 400 employees spread across all of the company's offices.

FAILURE TO SCALE

Unfortunately, First Guarantee Mortgage quickly found out this vendor's system didn't come remotely close to meeting the mortgage company's expectations. First Guarantee Mortgage suffered through a seemingly endless series of performance and reliability issues. "It was a fiasco," says Erik Mash, Vice President of Information Technology for First Guarantee Mortgage says, adding, "Instead of reduced administration, we were spending more time managing our phone system."

Voice quality was a serious issue, Mash says, adding that so was the erratic behavior of the network which would frequently drop the voice calls that are so critical to business. To get the VoIP system First Guarantee Mortgage had selected to work at all, the vendor had to cluster several systems together. A number of other issues beyond the dropped calls and voice quality ensued, and in the non-clustered environment the unified database didn't work, meaning that not everyone could dial in simultaneously to access their corporate voice mail. And not all employees could be included in the dial-by-name directory and voice mail could not be forwarded to all users.

After countless weekends spent trying to make the system work, Mash said the company had no choice but to look for another solution. "The morale of my crew was actually shot," Mash says.



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–Erik Mash

*Vice President of
Information Technology,
First Guarantee Mortgage*

BACK TO THE FUTURE

So less than six months after the VoIP deployment, First Guarantee Mortgage made the decision to swap out its system for a more reliable solution. The company went back to the drawing board and reviewed solutions from a number of vendors, including 3Com, Nortel, and Siemens. Mash says they were looking for the combination of performance, reliability, scalability, and a reasonable price. In the end, it was the ShoreTel solution that left the biggest impression, so that is the system the mortgage company chose.

“ShoreTel was sharp,” Mash says, adding it offered the promise of redundancy, scalability, and price-competitiveness that his company needed.

In the spring of 2005, First Guarantee Mortgage traded its then just-months old VoIP solution for a ShoreTel IP telephony system which included 500 IP phones, six ShoreGear-24/120 switches, eight ShoreGear-T1 switches, and a voice mail server. With a staff of six dedicated to the roll out, Mash was thrilled with the implementation.

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The positive results were immediate. Voice quality, reliability, and scalability gave the ShoreTel system the necessary power and stability to handle the company’s high call volume without missing a beat. Mash notes that all of the system components are scalable and portable, with the hardware designed as separate components so even if the T1 voice switch fails, the phone system can still continue to operate without interruption.

The ShoreTel system’s redundancy features were tested almost immediately, when First Guarantee Mortgage lost a fiber link shortly after the ShoreTel implementation. The PBX functioned as two different phone systems for an hour, but Mash notes the phone system worked flawlessly.

PAIN RELIEVER

Aside from its general reliability and the excellent voice quality, Mash says the feature-rich ShoreTel system offers a number of other important capabilities for the business, not the least of which is its ability to integrate with Microsoft® Outlook®, saving users a substantial amount of time because they don’t have to manage multiple directories. And the ShoreTel solution uses a unified messaging directory that can support many users connecting to the network remotely.

Users can pick up their phone, and move to any seat or go to any location in the company and bring their extension with them. Users can forward their voice mail to e-mail, consolidating all of their messages in a single place. Mash adds that users like the way the phones themselves look.

The ShoreTel system also boasts what Mash describes as an easy-to-navigate Web-based management interface that administrators can access from anywhere. The administrative console also offers enough capabilities that Mash says will ultimately result in far fewer calls to the ShoreTel support center.



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Mash says the performance of the ShoreTel system is far superior over both the IP and TDM PBXs it had in place. The system also offers a number of features that will enhance First Guarantee Mortgage's productivity and responsiveness to its clients, including a capability which makes it possible for an end user to set up different alert levels and rules, so a phone can function almost like a pager.

But perhaps the most obvious benefit is the almost immediate morale boost in the IT organization following the ShoreTel roll out. At the end of the day, the one benefit Mash can quantify without too much difficulty relates to his headaches. "I am going through a lot less aspirin," Mash laughs.