

Industry: Health

Installation: 3 Locations
15 ShoreGear®
60 voice switches,
6 ShoreGear
T1 voice switches,
268 ShorePhone
IP telephones

Date of Install: September, 2007



Challenge:

SSMC, with three disparate PBX-based phone systems, needed to standardize on one that would streamline operations, unify communications, boost productivity, enhance patient service, and offer cost savings.

Solution:

ShoreTel provided a comprehensive IP unified communications system, including ShoreGear voice switches, ShorePhone IP telephones, and ShoreWare™ Director for end-to-end system management.

Benefits:

- ShoreTel system, with its use of n+1 redundancy, is reliable and resilient, which is an absolute necessity in healthcare. This architecture also saves SSMC money on equipment.
- ShoreTel is easy to administer so management has been brought in-house, saving time and money.
- Customer service and employee productivity have been enhanced with robust personal and operator call manager features.
- ShoreTel's Workgroup capability provides powerful call routing capabilities plus real-time call volume and wait time data for supervisors.
- The ShoreTel system's Office Anywhere™ feature allow employees to sign in from anywhere to help when needed or put in their hours from home, while appearing to patients as though they are working within the walls of SSMC, projecting professionalism and protecting privacy.

South Shore Medical Center Improves Communications Health with ShoreTel® IP Unified Communications System

Communications Experts at DATAMART Deploy ShoreTel Pure IP Unified Communications Solution and Train Users for Improved Productivity and Enhanced Client Services

Summary

South Shore Medical Center (SSMC) in Massachusetts is an independently-owned, multi-specialty private practice of over 40 physicians engaged in internal medicine, pediatrics, surgery, and obstetrics/gynecology. Since 1962, SSMC, with a total of approximately 400 employees, has provided primary medical care as well as a variety of specialty and ancillary services to patients throughout the South Shore. At both its Norwell and Kingston locations, the organization strives to provide a pleasant, personal and professional atmosphere where patients feel comfortable the moment they walk through its doors. Its mission is to provide quality, comprehensive health care in a multi-specialty group practice setting.

Telephony Health Check

In early 2007, SSMC was faced with three different PBX-based telephone systems in its two health centers and one business office. With one Hitachi system and two Nortel systems, management was difficult and had to be outsourced, which meant that whenever a change needed to be made, a call or email would be made to various vendors—the change sometimes taking days or weeks to complete. In addition, there was no way to tie the locations together into one unified organization where employees could receive calls as teams regardless of their location.

Mark Flieger, SSMC's Chief Information Officer, and Bill Seale, SSMC's Senior Systems Architect, decided it was time to switch to IP telephony. "We were ready to make the changes necessary to start benefiting from IP telephony," said Flieger. "IP telephony offers so many benefits, such as not having to wire for both voice and data, plus offering an online directory and other added capabilities. We decided the time was right to standardize on a new IP telephony system."

Flieger familiarized himself with and talked with representatives from Avaya, Cisco, Nortel and ShoreTel. He learned everything he could about each system and eventually eliminated Avaya, Cisco and Nortel based on the architecture of those solutions, specifically in terms of reliability and cost-effectiveness of building in redundancy. One of the top reasons SSMC chose ShoreTel was its uniquely distributed architecture allows the use of n+1 redundancy. (See Sidebar.)

"The architecture of the ShoreTel system, specifically the n+1 idea and costs associated, were the clinchers for us," said Flieger. "In addition, ShoreTel is easy to deploy and administer and the feature set is varied, offering us all that we needed and then some. We heard great things about ShoreTel, as well as ShoreTel's integration partner, DATAMART, from Rich Bertone, Atrius Health's Lead Systems Architect, and he sure didn't steer us wrong. It's been a great experience."

The Prescription

Massachusetts-based DATAMART is a 34-year-old firm focused on helping companies to improve communications effectiveness, reliability and productivity. The integrator provided SSMC with 15 ShoreGear 60 voice switches, 6 ShoreGear T1 voice switches, and 268 ShorePhone™ IP 230 telephones across the three sites. Each site also has its own ShoreTel distributed voicemail server.

DATAMART



ShoreTel's N+1 Reliability

ShoreTel's n+1 redundancy improves reliability since it does not double the hardware. For instance, the n+1 redundancy solution may need two extra units (where parts to the IP telephony system are duplicated within the two units); while a 1:1 redundancy solution needs five extra units because each unit is duplicated in its entirety. Essentially, using n+1 redundancy creates a multi-unit system with no single point of failure and eliminates the need for 1:1 redundancy, saving power, cost, and possible failure to power up if a standby unit in "cold" (or un-powered) mode is faulty and not detected as defective until it's needed.

DATAMART and SSMC collaborated closely to train end users on the system, which went very well, according to both trainers and Flieger. "Users adapted very well to the new ShoreTel system," said Flieger. "Not everybody uses the ShoreTel desktop software, but that's only because of the nature of healthcare. Many workers are part time and they don't use a workstation – they share only a telephone. But there are so many benefits to the ShorePhone IP telephone itself also. Everybody is enjoying the system, regardless of what they are using."

Diagnosis: Improved Productivity

The ShoreTel IP Unified Communications system integrated well into SSMC's existing technologies, particularly its existing Citrix Presentation Server farm, which is a key capability since most SSMC users access software applications through Citrix. Whether installed on a regular PC or deployed via Citrix technologies, ShoreWare® Personal Call Manager was easy to deploy to on-site and remote users.

ShoreTel IP Unified Communications systems are easy to use and manage, flexible, and reliable. With the ShoreTel system in place, all SSMC employees are now on the same phone and voicemail system, using the online company directory available from each phone to reach co-workers by dialing them by name rather than having to dial extension numbers. With Personal Call Manager, employees make calls from the same online company directory plus their personal MS Outlook contacts. They can also see who is calling them and where they are calling from.

The ShoreTel system's Office Anywhere feature allows SSMC employees to choose the device they work from – for instance, a cell phone or home phone – and that device assumes the identity and capabilities of his or her regular office extension. For example, the caller-ID information provided when the employee makes a call will reflect the SSMC office number instead of the mobile or home-office phone actually being used. Office Anywhere also enables seamless participation in ShoreTel Workgroups, and it provides SSMC with a cost-effective method of pulling in remote and home office workers.

"Office Anywhere allows you to extend work to home," said Flieger. "Users love that. Physicians and nurses can work at home more without worrying about patients getting their home contact information. Rather than having to use caller ID blocking, which usually causes people not to pick up their phones, they simply dial the phone and the person they are calling sees 'South Shore Medical Center' on caller ID, which prompts them to pick up the phone right away."

The ShoreTel system also provides SSMC with work style flexibility for its employees, which benefits the worker, the company, and the environment. "We also use Office Anywhere for transcriptionists who don't need to be physically present – they can work at home but they still have access to the ShoreTel features. Given what commuting is like in the Boston Area, the ShoreTel system helps us give them the opportunity to work at home while also tying them into the system to participate as a team member as though they are in the office, with access to easy transfer, 4-digit dialing and all the rest. Anything they can do in the office, they can do at home. There's an added bonus with Office Anywhere as well. It helps us avoid tracking company telephone expenses incurred from private phones. So many companies that have home or remote workers need to deal with figuring out how to reimburse for phone usage, whether the worker is using their home or cell phone. The ShoreTel system eliminates that."



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– Mark Flieger,
CIO, South Shore
Medical Center

Diagnosis: Enhanced Patient Service

In addition to ShoreWare Personal Call Manager, SSMC is using ShoreWare Operator Call Manager for its operators. This application provides operators with critical information necessary for exceptional customer service. For example, when the phone rings, a call-routing log displays the caller’s experience within the system to the SSMC operator. Before transferring callers, the call-transfer screen displays information about who is available and who is already on the phone. With this unprecedented level of information, operators not only connect callers faster than ever, but also give them the highest level of professional service. Also, dynamic, online directories eliminate paper directories – which are usually out of date anyway and not usually available online. With the complete company at their fingertips, along with knowledge about who is available and where a caller has already been sent, the operator can transfer using a simple drag-and-drop tool to the most appropriate person.

“Our operators are infatuated with the ShoreTel system—dragging and dropping calls to people they know are going to answer—it’s changed their lives,” said Flieger.

SSMC also utilizes ShoreTel’s Workgroups capability and has established more than 50 workgroups for such groups as reception, nurse triage, helpdesk, billing, and patient services. ShoreTel’s workgroups enables SSMC to consolidate these groups of workers into one organization, even though the individuals are geographically dispersed, and route all calls directed to that workgroup to the next available staff member. Also, helpdesk workgroup staff members can work from any SSMC location, and ShoreTel Workgroups makes it easy for employees to log in and out of a workgroup.

“Workgroups is such an important feature for us – one reason is that we collect metrics at the workgroup level,” said Flieger. “We used to have to track users’ availability manually in order to know who was open for a call. Now we just track it at the workgroup level and operators don’t have to know individuals’ availability status, just the workgroup status.”

In addition, in healthcare, often there are times when more help is needed to answer phones. The real-time nature of ShoreTel Workgroup tracking is appreciated by SSMC. “Supervisors get valuable information from ShoreTel’s real-time workgroup monitoring such as of longest wait time and number of queued calls,” said Flieger. “If a supervisor notices a wait time has reached a maximum limit and more people are needed to answer incoming calls, more workers can be added right away, even if they have to log into a workgroup from home. Before, we could only look at those kinds of statistics after the fact – with ShoreTel, we can make changes that positively affect patient service right away before maximum wait times are surpassed.”

Cost Savings

SSMC uses ShoreTel’s ShoreWare Director for system management, troubleshooting and planning. From anywhere on the network, a network administrator can launch ShoreWare Director to gain access and manage any site and feature, including voice mail, the automated attendant and desktop applications. When a new user is added, the centralized database is automatically updated and every voice switch is notified. After the user information is entered, a mailbox is created and the automated attendant, dial-by name and number feature, and online directories are updated within seconds. Changes can be made just as quickly and easily.

DATAMART



Moves, adds and changes are so easy, so while we don't add a site every month, we do need to make changes on the fly and ease is important to us," said Flieger. "While we can do the day-to-day administration, DATAMART advises us on advanced technical plans. I was recently talking with them about a special voice mail application that we were considering having ShoreTel help us develop and they're deeply involved in advising us. While they're ShoreTel integrators, they are experts in their own right. We'll never be voice experts, so anytime we want to do something new, such as customization, we talk to DATAMART."

Prognosis: Excellent

SSMC is happy with its choice to go with DATAMART and ShoreTel. SSMC will be adding another location in Weymouth in early 2008 and will be turning to DATAMART to supply it with more ShoreTel equipment and technical advice.

"The best part of switching to a ShoreTel IP telephony system is our ability to more easily support our ever-changing workflows," said Flieger. "In healthcare, we're continuously re-engineering and improving our workflows. Before ShoreTel, if we wanted to change call routing, we'd have to make an appointment with three different system vendors and within days, if not weeks, the vendors completed our requested changes. Now with the ShoreTel system in place, what took days or weeks now takes minutes. We've also completely eliminated the need for a telecom technician. From the beginning to the end of our implementation, I've found that ShoreTel and DATAMART are companies that care deeply about being responsive to their customer's business needs. We couldn't have made a more positive change than choosing DATAMART and ShoreTel."

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