



Medical software company uses Switchvox to expand locations

Growth and changing communications needs caused FormFast to replace its aging phone system with Switchvox



As a business grows, its telecommunications needs change and most aging phone systems just can't keep up with the volume or flexibility required.

It's often said that if you own or work in a small or mid-size business (SMB) you're likely to wear many different hats, as there is no shortage of responsibilities and never enough resources. The main focus is centered on serving your customers; and the needs of the business itself usually slip down the priority list of projects.

That's why it's not uncommon for many businesses, even the most tech-savvy, to delay investing in a more advanced business communications solution until they're left with no other choice. It's often when an under-performing, legacy phone system completely fails, or begins to fall short of customer demands, hinders operations and workflow efficiency, or hampers company growth that a company makes the switch. As a business grows, its telecommunications needs change and most aging phone systems just can't keep up with the volume or flexibility required. Company growth and changing communications needs are exactly what propelled FormFast to reevaluate its aging phone system and replace it with Switchvox.

FormFast has 45 employees working from their call center headquarters in St. Louis, and has a growing network of more than 100 remote employees working from their homes and private offices across the Midwest.

The Need to Expand Remote Offices

FormFast is a technology leader in automating medical documents and streamlining workflow for hospitals and medical clinics. The company has 45 employees working from their call center headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri, and has a growing network of more than 100 remote employees working from their homes and private offices across the Midwest. It was this expansion in remote access, along with the need for a more streamlined system of connecting these employees that triggered their search for a more advanced, budget-friendly VoIP solution. They wanted a solution that was not only easier in terms of remote set-up, but would save them money as well.

“The work of our remote representatives involves telephone conversations and the recording of business transactions, so they need more than a cell phone for this job,” says FormFast Systems Analyst Mark Ratliff. “In order to prevent our having to go into every home we set up with our system, we were using these devices called MCK telecommunications adapters. These modules convert analog phone lines into digital signals that connect our remote operators to the Nortel in St. Louis. They often did not work correctly, and they were overly sensitive. The slightest jiggling of a wire and the employee could not connect, which presented us with many challenges.” Ratliff says he spent an extraordinary amount of time troubleshooting problems over the phone and shipping and receiving the non-working MCKs.

The Search for a Solution is On

FormFast realized they could not grow with the limitations of their existing phone system, so they began searching for a new solution. For several months, they researched their options for a business communications system that would meet their needs.

Initially, the company looked into open source Asterisk, the most widely used telephony framework available. Asterisk is used by IT professionals to convert an ordinary computer into a custom telecommunications server, and is also the foundation for Digium’s Switchvox Unified Communications (UC) solution.

According to Digium partner Matt Rygelski of PhoneWire in Fairview Heights, Illinois, FormFast is a highly technical company with the resources and skills to implement a customized Asterisk solution. At first glance, it made sense to replace their 15 year old digital Nortel system with a custom Asterisk solution.

“All they needed was to upgrade their Linux drivers and install Asterisk on one of their servers, and they could have built their own solution; but, then they decided, ‘Why reinvent the wheel?’” says Rygelski. “They didn’t want to take the time to configure Asterisk and do all the backend programming.”

“The truth is, we are heavily a tech company and I was familiar with Asterisk, but I am not a telephone guy,” says Ratliff.

Once FormFast decided against building their own custom solution, they began looking into proprietary systems.

“We had four companies come in and do presentations or bring in demos, including Avaya and ShoreTel,” says Ratliff. “We are technicians and anything having to do with technology is like having a new toy to play with. We started working with the Digium Switchvox web interface and saw our ability to customize things, to program the

auto attendant, IVR and Caller ID, reviewed all the mapping functions, and realized the option of adding our own applet. Switchvox nailed the decision for us.”

“We started working with the Digium Switchvox web interface and saw our ability to customize things, to program the auto attendant, IVR, and Caller ID reviewed all the mapping functions, and realized the option of adding our own applet. Switchvox nailed the decision for us.”

Mark Ratliff

Analyst,
FormFast Systems

FormFast Finds the Perfect Solution

“Switchvox was built for a company just like ours – one that wants all the features and functionality of an Asterisk-driven system, but is preconfigured and packaged at a bundled price, making it significantly more affordable than any of the big box brands,” says Ratliff.

Cost and expandability were selling points of the Switchvox system. “We didn’t have a dollar figure for a budget, but Switchvox definitely saved us money,” he says. “The Shoretel system was triple the cost of Switchvox for the same features, and we really like the ability to expand. We were tapped out with the Nortel, but we had 45 expansion slots at the top end with the Switchvox. At the time of the switchover, we purchased 100 licenses. Since implementation, we have added 25 more and there have been no problems with Switchvox keeping up with the growth.” Since then, FormFast has doubled from 75 to 150 USB wireless headsets.

In addition to the main Switchvox server, FormFast was also able to buy and preconfigure a cold spare for emergency backup and redundancy. “If we were to lose our entire phone system, I could have us back up and running within thirty minutes,” Ratliff says.

FormFast especially enjoys the ease of setting up Bria Counterpath softphones remotely, which is significantly easier than troubleshooting MCK adapters. “We do not have to go into any of our employees’ homes at all. Instead, we simply log into the Switchvox web-interface and from there we can set up the user, set up voicemail to email, build our own rules, etc.”

It was also important for FormFast to be able to integrate with Salesforce, their primary CRM software. “FormFast employees were not anticipating the extent of the detailed information from Salesforce that could be accessed through the Switchvox system, which is a huge help to the representative while on the phone with a customer,” says PhoneWire’s Rygelski. “It was like night and day for them to be able to read past notes and make notations on customer records. In the past, everything was manual, done by hand, which included a lot of human error. Now all the records are right there in front of the representative, and the caller has no idea the calls are not coming from an office or a call center.”

In addition to Switchvox, FormFast is using Digium’s SIP trunking as a cushion to handle extra call volume. With the power of Switchvox, this medical software company now has a call center call queue for technical support and complete administrative call control of a dispersed team of employees.



Empowering Communication

www.digium.com • www.asterisk.org • +1 256-428-6000

Digium, Inc. • 445 Jan Davis Drive NW, Huntsville, AL 35806, USA