

Baseball Team Champions Technology and Scores Big Win with Fans



Tampa Bay Rays increase ticket sales and fan loyalty using Cisco Unified Communications and Cisco Smart Business Portal.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
<p>TAMPA BAY RAYS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports • Saint Petersburg, Florida • 400 Employees
<p>BUSINESS CHALLENGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdated technology infrastructure could not support rapid organizational growth • Sales agents lacked visibility into fan history, limiting ability to sell tickets and build customer loyalty • Highly mobile workforce was hampered by inability to easily reach people and access information
<p>NETWORK SOLUTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisco Smart Business Portal provides call center agents with complete view of the customer • Cisco Unified Communications solutions improve call handling and agent productivity • Cisco wireless solutions, Extension Mobility, and Unified Presence help mobile workforce stay connected
<p>BUSINESS RESULTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New call center helps agents increase sales by 200,000 tickets, and ticket service complaints have dropped 85 percent • Promotional opportunities have increased 70 percent • Monthly telephone costs incurred by remote scouts have dropped 40 percent

Business Challenges

When principal owner Stuart Sternberg acquired the Tampa Bay Devil Rays in 2006, he had big plans to transform one of major league baseball’s youngest franchises. However, the vestiges of the old way of doing things could still be found in an aging technology infrastructure that was hampering the team’s winning transformation. Juan Ramirez was brought in as senior director of information technology to revitalize the outdated communications environment. “Many departments were growing by 50 percent a year, and the 12-year-old phone system was incapable of keeping up with the growth,” says Ramirez. The data network was a little more up to date but still rudimentary.

It was difficult and frustrating for the Rays’ highly mobile workforce to stay connected and in touch. Most importantly, the team lacked its own call center or the ability to get visibility into fan histories in order to sell more tickets, the lifeblood of any team’s business success. “We had an automatic call distributor with a hunt group, so calls just bounced around until a sales agent picked up the phone,”

says Ramirez. “We had no way of knowing how many calls were dropped and no information on customers calling in. We didn’t even have caller ID.”

Ramirez had already started working with Cisco on updating the data network, but he decided to propose a triple-play technology change to the management team: 1) replace multiple networks with a single unified ‘Connected Stadium’ network, 2) install a new wide-area network, and 3) create the Rays’ first call center. The whole network had to be designed and implemented in three months during the off-season, including a complete redesign of the network at the team’s stadium and headquarters at Tropicana Field. In addition, the new wide-area network had to connect a remote sales office in Tampa and the old private branch exchange (PBX) had to be retired.

To get this done, the organization invited several large vendors to bid on the project, but there was a catch: nervous about the viability of a converged network, the management team wanted a 90-day trial before committing to the project. “Only Cisco stepped up to the plate and said they could do it,” says Ramirez.

Network Solutions

The trial started with 35 users at the corporate offices and the creation of the call center based on the Cisco® Unified Contact Center. The pilot was only 10 days old when the management team, impressed by the results, voted overwhelmingly to move ahead with the project. The team of sales agents called the new call center “sent from heaven.”

From the outset, the IT group’s vision was to tie the call center into back-end databases and Arctics, the Ticketmaster customer relationship management (CRM) application. “It was our intention to build this application in house,” says Ramirez. “When we told Cisco what we were trying to achieve, they invited us to try the Cisco Smart Business Portal.”

The Cisco Smart Business Portal is a desktop dashboard that integrates Cisco Unified Communications platforms with business-critical applications, including CRM, enterprise resource planning (ERP), Web applications, and Internet content such as maps and weather. “Cisco built a connector to the Arctics system in less than two months. It would have taken us at least a year to build a system like this, and the development costs would have been prohibitive for a small franchise,” says Ramirez.

When a call comes into the Rays’ call center, any prior history on the customer is retrieved from the CRM database and appears as a screen pop. When a transaction is completed, the new information automatically updates the CRM database, so that every sales agent has the most recent and complete view of the customer.

“The agent is now presented with a wealth of historical information about customers, such as where they sat and how many tickets they purchased. The breadth of information they have to improve the customer experience and increase revenue is just amazing.”

—Juan G. Ramirez, Senior Director of Information Technology, Tampa Bay Rays

“In a remarkably short period of time, I would say that this system has made our sales staff one of the best trained and most efficient in the MLB [Major League Baseball],” says Brian Auld, senior vice president of business operations.

The IT group is continuing to explore ways to use the Cisco Smart Business Portal to present more useful customer information to agents. Within a few months of going live, the IT group has tied the Smart Business Portal into the team’s new promotional programs. Each program is assigned a unique telephone number, and call center agents see an icon of the specific promotional program when a customer calls in on that number. This allows agents to engage the customer in a more targeted manner. The first promotional program using the new call center sold out an entire section for Opening Day within hours.

The Rays' IT group has also built an internal application based on the Cisco monitoring tool, called the Rays CSQ Dashboard. The dashboard displays real-time reports about the state of each sales agent's queue, the average wait time, longest wait time, and more, and sends alerts to call center managers when a caller has been waiting too long. As soon as the application went live, the number of abandoned calls went from an average of 36 per day to only one per day.

"The Tampa Bay Rays have made a concerted effort to become the most advanced ticket call center in the MLB," says Brian Richeson, senior vice president of sales and service. "Call center managers can even forward recorded calls to directors, which keeps all of us close to the needs and interests of our fans."

Business Results

Today, there are over 50 agents using the Smart Business Portal in the Rays Call Center. "The agent is now presented with a wealth of historical information about customers, such as the last time they attended a game, where they sat, and how many tickets they purchased. The breadth of information they have to improve the customer experience and increase revenue is just amazing," says Ramirez. The value of personalization and better service is evident in the results: over 200,000 pre-season tickets were sold this year.

In addition to the changes in customer-facing service, internal communications has also improved. Overnight, executives went from tedious steps to access voicemail to having their voicemail messages appear on their personal digital assistant (PDA) handheld devices. With Cisco Unified Mobility, employees can have calls ring simultaneously at their desk and cell phones so they do not miss calls even when moving between locations. Instead of hunting around for telephone numbers, they can right-click to dial a number directly from their Outlook address books.

Cisco Unified Presence makes unplanned collaboration faster and easier by providing information about a user's availability status and connectivity options. Wireless coverage in 90 percent of the corporate offices allows employees to move from place to place and stay connected. Ramirez says that the overwhelming response from everyone has been, "I can't believe I can do all of this."

"I expected to go through some growing pains when we implemented the new system, because it usually takes a good while for an organization to adapt to a new technology," says the Rays' President Matthew Silverman. "However, thanks to Cisco's ability to work hand-in-hand with our IT staff, we never had a down period."

The corporate network is connected to a Tampa Rays' store and sales office in Tampa, which shares the same phone system. This eliminates long-distance expenses and allows easy four-digit dialing between locations. "Even though the offices are on different ends of Florida, people feel like they are part of one office, one team," says Ramirez.

This includes the most remote users in the Rays organization, the scouts. "We have scouts all over the world," says Andrew Friedman, senior vice president of baseball operations. "Their cell phones bills were up to US\$2500 to \$3000 each month." Now the scouts are equipped with laptops and Cisco IP Softphones integrated with the IP telephony system and secured with VPN connections. "We estimate our monthly phone bills just from the scouts have dropped by as much as 40 percent. With this system, our staff no longer have to think twice before picking up the phone to check on a prospect anywhere in the world."

The new network was also ready three weeks ahead of the completion target, and, Ramirez says, there was not “a single help desk call about problems. It was a home run.” The project has been so successful that Ramirez was named the Rays’ “Employee of the Year.”

PRODUCT LIST

Routing and Switching

- Cisco 2821 Integrated Services Router
- Cisco 3825 Integrated Services Router
- Cisco Catalyst® 3750 PoE Switches
- Cisco Catalyst 3560 PoE Switches

Security and VPN

- Cisco ASA 5500 Series Adaptive Security Appliances
- IronPort E-mail Security

Voice and Unified Communications

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager (CallManager)
- Cisco Unity® Unified Messaging
- Cisco Unified Contact Center Express
- Cisco Smart Business Portal
- Cisco Unified Presence
- Cisco Unified Mobility

Wireless

- Cisco Aironet® 1242AG Access Point
- Cisco 4400 Series Wireless LAN Controllers
- Cisco Aironet 1310 Access Point/Bridge

Next Steps

The network has become a tremendous asset to the Rays as they plan their vision for a Connected Stadium. The IT group installed Cisco Unified IP 7971 phones with high-resolution, color touchscreen displays in the stadium’s 66 suites. Ramirez plans to develop Extensible Markup Language (XML)-based applications to deliver content such as weather and out-of-town scoreboards, as well as order food and merchandise and play interactive games. The Rays can also provide telephony and wireless services to stadium vendors, enabling a new revenue stream for the franchise.

“When I started here, we had 150 people and the network could not support them,” says Ramirez. “Now we have over 400 people and a foundation that will take us well into the future with even more exciting capabilities to grow closer to our fans and improve teamwork at every level.”



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