

## **Conferencing solution helps Crane Telecommunications to improve productivity and reduce costs**

### **The company**

Crane Telecommunications Group is a Value Added Distributor of communications equipment, software and services. The company believes in partnerships and in the benefits of mutual success - and has over 175 specialist staff based in the UK and Benelux, who are dedicated to supporting resellers. Crane refer to themselves as 'a friendly organisation with the expertise to support our customers in selling communications equipment to the SME and Enterprise markets'.

Crane's manufacturer partners - Avaya, Nortel, Mitel, LG and BT Network Services - develop business tools, technology products and applications that enable both internal and external business communication. Crane then package these products and applications, adding services that support and enable reseller businesses to turn them into bespoke business communication tools such as telephone systems and call centres.

### **The requirement**

Although a telecommunications distributor themselves, Crane have to deal with many of the same communications challenges as are faced by other businesses. But generally they always know someone who can help them to solve a business issue! In early 2004, as Crane's sales team was expanding, they discovered that it was becoming harder and harder to communicate effectively to all necessary staff or to pin down the required people for vital meetings. There simply were not enough hours in the day to bring people into the office for meetings.

In addition, as technology becomes more complex and individual projects become more detailed - with a requirement to involve more staff from various areas of the business - a lack of time was causing a slow-down in the rate at which projects could be progressed. Crane needed to find a way to allow multiple people to talk to one another at the same time, without involving a face to face meeting.

The obvious solution was audio conferencing, but their own internal telephone system would only support a small number of simultaneous participants – and external suppliers were costly and not as controllable as Crane would have liked. So they started to look at other options which would meet their requirements simply and effectively.

### **The solution**

Crane soon found the answer they were looking for in the Avaya IP Office. This has a conferencing system built-in which can support up to 64 participants on any single call. The IP Office could be easily piggy-backed off their house switch and provided fully-featured conferencing capability at a very affordable price. Not only does the conferencing system enable up to 64 people to talk together simultaneously, it also offers a Web Client facility which means that all participants can view relevant images, controlled by the chairperson, during the call. Nick Wright, Avaya SMBS Product Manager for Crane explains further:

*"With the new system in place we can now run training sessions or technical update sessions for example, which take place via an audio conference call – but with relevant presentations or other documentation being viewed on screen at the same time. We can even run entire sales meetings this way, meaning that our account management team do not have to spend hours driving to a central location".*

### **The benefits**

The benefits of the conferencing solution are easy to see, not only in terms of improved efficiency but also in terms of travelling time saved, travelling costs and even hotel bills eliminated. In addition there is a generally increased level of productivity, as a sales person can be involved in a conference call whilst on the road to another meeting. Nick continues:

*"It just makes things so much more efficient. Not only can we arrange scheduled meeting sessions, it is also ideal for ad hoc 'audio meetings' where three or more people are required on one call. Often one of our account managers might be on the phone to a reseller and need to discuss something with a member of the tech support team. Instead of ending the call, chatting to the other person and then calling the reseller back with the answer, they can simply now conference them in.*

*Regardless of whether the reseller is in the office or out and about on his mobile, it's simply a case of putting the call on hold and transferring it into a virtual conference room. Our account manager can then call the tech support team, locate the person they need and bring them into the conference as well, without ever having to end the call with the reseller. All three (or more) parties can then chat together, resolve whatever it was that needed to be sorted – and then revert to the original call between the initial two people. In fact, if you need to, the original instigator of the call can duck out altogether and leave the other parties chatting to one another in the conference room!*

*It's really just a case of getting used to the technology. The right training is important to make sure that users know exactly how to set up the conferences and so on, but once you're familiar with doing it, then it just becomes another everyday business tool – and a very useful one at that".*

In addition to the obvious business benefits of improved communication with time and cost saving, the built-in conferencing functionality of the IP Office is also incredibly easy to administrate – as the system also includes a web scheduler which can manage the entire invitation process for conference participants. This means that meetings can be set up in advance and all participants will be emailed to let them know a date and time to call in, along with a dial-in number and a unique pin code for security. Regular ongoing meetings can also be set up in advance, with an agreed list of participants being notified automatically at a fixed time prior to the conference. If preferred, the system can also make the call at the appropriate time, rather than relying on the participant to remember to dial in.

### **The future**

Crane have been using the conferencing capability of the Avaya IP Office to great effect for a number of months now and are currently considering new ways in which the system can offer even greater benefits to the business and also to their reseller channel. One option being investigated is the possibility of running virtual reseller training sessions, instead of bringing their reseller sales people into the office and taking them off the road for an entire day.

These sessions would be managed via a standard audio conference call but supported by the Web Client application which would enable all training materials to be viewed on screen during the training session. Nick concludes:

*"The built-in conferencing capabilities of the IP Office have made a huge difference for us. Now, when our manufacturer partners develop new promotions or offers, we can set up a call and brief everyone, complete with images and copies of relevant presentations, in a matter of hours.*

*We can also see how the system could be used in many different business types. Any company with more than one office, or with field-based or remote workers would definitely see a benefit from using this technology. It would also be especially useful for anyone dealing with customers or suppliers overseas, as it could even reduce the need for air travel. Now that we are used to having the capability available to us on a daily basis, I can't imagine going back to a time where it was not a part of our everyday business life".*