Case study

The Via Group has HP on the line

Adding HP Networking services and technology to its solutions offering allows The Via Group to maximize the value of Microsoft Lync unified communications

Industry
Communications technology

Objective
Maximize the value of unified communications to customers with Lync and HP Networking

Approach
Leverage networking technology to enable end-to-end unified communications solutions

IT matters
- Comprehensive assessments of network, servers, and customer needs ensure Lync deployments meet or exceed expectations by unlocking the true power of unified communications
- SDN technology, reference architectures smooth deployments, mitigate risks, and optimize Lync availability and performance

Business matters
- End-to-end solution enables customers to leverage full, transformative benefits of unified communications technology
- Attention to all solution components minimizes risk of future performance or availability issues

The Via Group

"When we partner with HP on a Lync deployment, our customers are the biggest winners."

– Michael Cassady, director of marketing, The Via Group

The Via Group knows Microsoft® Lync®. It knows telephony. But to deliver the highest quality unified communications solutions to its customers, networking becomes critical. So The Via Group leverages HP Networking technology and support. The result: Via can now deliver end-to-end, integrated Lync solutions that maximize value to customers and minimize risk.

Businesses are getting excited about Microsoft Lync.

They realize that Lync, a Unified Communications and Collaboration (UC&C) technology, is more than an alternative to traditional telephony. It's a powerful productivity tool. It enables companies to speed up their decision-making processes. It connects people regardless of where they're physically located, eliminating not only communication barriers but also barriers that impede the sharing of ideas and business-critical information.

Nobody is watching this trend more closely than The Via Group, a value added reseller (VAR) and HP partner based in Houston. The Via Group got its start in the 1990s as a telecommunications service provider, but more recently its business took a new direction. "Several years ago, we were brought in by another vendor to help Microsoft with its own, internal deployment of first-generation unified messaging technology," says Michael Cassady, director of marketing, The Via Group. "We saw the technology's potential, and soon afterward we joined Microsoft's voice partner program."

The connections Via made with Microsoft proved invaluable, helping the VAR acquire deep expertise in the product that is sold, today, as Lync. But Via quickly realized their customers needed more. They needed highly integrated networking for flawless voice and video conferencing, media gateways for connectivity to legacy telephony, unified wireless and innovation like SDN to make networking and unified communications even more reliable and easier to use—and for that, it found an ideal partner in HP.

Network functionality critical to Lync's success

Via traces its decision to partner with HP to its first experiences with implementing Microsoft Lync. "We recognized that our customers need a solid network infrastructure for their Lync deployment, especially if they plan to use some of its more bandwidth-intensive features, like video, conferencing and desktop sharing," says Cassady.

Specifically, Via found that some customers' network devices were out-of-date or lacked the capacity, intelligence and interoperability to handle the types of traffic that Lync functionality requires. These weaknesses

weren't always obvious to the customers. After all, their networks handled traditional data flows without any problem. But install Lync, and there was a potential risk for network-related issues: latency, jitter, packet loss, availability, or issues with voice prioritization. "We have this powerful application, Lync, that offers so much potential value," says Cassady. "But without a properly sized and configured network, a customer's experience with Lync could turn into a disappointment."

The Via Group realized that it needed to offer a more comprehensive solution to its unified communications customers—one that would allow it to manage all variables that might impact the success of a deployment and ultimately deliver the business value unified communications can deliver when deployed properly.

The concept was one the VAR understands very well: in its work in the telephony space, Via typically installs end-to-end solutions comprising servers, PBX switches, and support services. This ensures that all components meet Via's rigorous standards, and that the components are properly integrated. It also represents higher quality-of-service to customers because Via can take full responsibility for the performance of the solution. Customers can be 100% confident that if issues arise, Via will be able to solve them.

What Via wanted was to add a similar end-to-end solution to its UC&C portfolio. "We wanted an offering that encompasses a true network solution, along with the Lync application, integration, and maintenance services," says Cassady. "It would allow us to manage all critical variables that effect the success of Lync deployments."

As Via began searching for a way to expand its Lync deployment capabilities, it discovered that HP has emerged as a network leader within the Lync unified communications industry. "We learned that HP is heavily involved in developing network technology for companies that want to deploy Lync," Cassady says. "And when our two companies began to talk, we found that our expertise in traditional telecom is a match for HP, particularly in situations where customers are migrating from PBX to Lync."

At that point, Cassady says, "Everything started to come together into a complete end-to-end customer solution for Lync."

Network assessment, sophisticated technology

Today, Via and HP approach potential Lync customers as technology partners, offering complementary skillsets that, combined, substantially increase the value solution set to those customers.

In a typical scenario, Via performs an assessment to determine the customer's readiness for unified communications. The assessment establishes how the customer's legacy PBX's, video conference systems or other solutions can interoperate through a planned transition, all while moving to the advantages of an open standards based networking and UC solution.

If an upgrade is needed, HP's network experts can also work with the customer to determine whether it's best to perform the upgrade at once, or in stages. For example, some customers want to take a phased approach to implementing Lync, perhaps by starting with Lync's instant messaging and presence features while keeping their original PBX for replacement at a later date. (Presence is a Lync function that allows users to see if other users are online, and therefore immediately reachable.) If that's the case, the existing data network may be able to support the deployment. Then later, when the customer is ready for additional Lync capabilities, such as audio, video, and web conferencing, or the PBX is in need of replacement, or the customer desires to optimize utilization of the entire converged system, a network upgrade can be performed to support those roadmap goals and objectives.

Partnering with HP also enables Via to leverage cutting-edge HP Networking technology. One example is The HP Network Optimizer SDN (Software Defined Networking) Application for Microsoft Lync. This technology automates the provisioning of network path and Quality of Service (QoS) policy, which reduces the need for manual, device-by-device configuration. Another example is leveraging an SDN-enabled network to support security software or other network and applications functions. With an SDN-enabled network, the overall infrastructure becomes easier to manage, simpler to maintain and much more flexible for deploying applications and services. This, in turn, delivers cost and time savings, and makes the network much more applications-aware.

HP's network consultants also use reference architectures designed and tested specifically for Lync. These reference architectures make it easier and simpler for Via to validate and test the solutions it architects, creating integration efficiencies, smoothing its Lync deployments and mitigating against risks related to an overall solution design and network configuration.

Customer at a glance

Software
• Microsoft® Lync®
• HP Network Optimizer SDN (Software Defined Networking) Application for Microsoft Lync
• HP IMC (Intelligent Management Center) Service Health Manager
• HP Microsoft Lync Sizer

HP Lync specific hardware
• HP MSR Survivable Branch Module for Microsoft Lync
• HP Lync Qualified Wi-Fi solutions
• HP phones optimized for Microsoft Lync
• HP Lync Qualified SIP Survivable Media Gateways
• HP Lync Qualified Routing & Switching

HP services
• HP Networking Technical Services

The application—and the migration of business-critical telephony processes

While HP addresses the customer network, Via's role focuses on two other aspects of the solution. One is the Lync application itself. "We know Lync inside and out," Cassady says. "We help businesses understand the solution not only in terms of their legacy telephony, but as a productivity tool that goes well beyond traditional telecommunications. We help them figure out how to adopt Lync to address both immediate needs and their long range strategic goals for a communications and collaboration platform."

Via also evaluates the customer's existing telephony architecture. "We determine what PBXs are in place and what functionalities are associated with each box," Cassady explains. "Telecommunications is a business critical process. We need to protect that process as part of any Lync migration."

Via also typically evaluates the customer's server environment. For this, the VAR uses the HP Microsoft Lync Sizer, which allows Via to input parameters based on the customer requirements and server models, and evaluate the capacity of the server architecture, from remote connectivity to RAID redundancy level.

Bridging silos, fostering synergies

By combining their areas of expertise—networking, Lync, and telephony—Via and HP offer customers an end-to-end solution that delivers more value and helps reduce the risk of business disruption. "We work as a team, and we offer a complete solution," says Cassady. "We can help businesses bridge internal siloes that might separate their IT and telephony organizations—something that is absolutely critical for transformative application centric solutions like Lync."

The two companies also complement each other in more subtle ways. The Via Group appreciates the power of the HP brand, for example, it knows that partnering with HP enhances its credibility with enterprise customers.

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– Michael Cassady, director of marketing, The Via Group

Both companies also have strong relationships and ties to Microsoft. Via, for example, is a Microsoft Gold Communications Certified Partner for System Integration Services and also a Lync Day 2 Certified Support Partner. HP and Microsoft are long-time alliance partners, and have a multi-year partnership specific to unified communications; HP is also a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner. These extensive relationships foster synergies that ensure HP and Via stay abreast of best-of-breed technology and practices.

The ultimate winner of this partnership, of course, is the customer.

"The power of Lync is that it can transform organizations," Cassady says. "It can knit organizations together, enable people to make faster decisions, and improve workforce productivity.

"The minute we glimpsed at what Lync could do, we knew we wanted to bring the solution to businesses that need it," Cassady concludes. "And our partnership with HP is one way we're doing exactly that."