

Cisco helps transform everyday communication for deaf people

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
CUSTOMER NAME · Significant (UK) Ltd
LOCATION · London, UK
INDUSTRY · Public Authority
BUSINESS SIZE · 8 employees
BUSINESS CHALLENGE · New regulations require equal access to community services for deaf people · Lack of sign language interpreters to meet growing demand · Inflexibility and inefficiency of traditional video conference technology
SOLUTION · Cisco Unified Communications system: video enabled contact centre
BUSINESS VALUE · Makes everyday communication for deaf people much simpler · Provides instant access to qualified sign language interpreting services · Cuts the cost of using sign language interpreting services by more than 60% for short meetings · Enables efficient use of scarce sign language interpreting resources · Ensure flexible, automated management reporting

Cisco Unified Communications system makes access to community services much faster and easier for deaf people.

Business Challenge

Significant (UK) Ltd is a social enterprise set up to improve everyday communication problems that face deaf people in the UK. Significant – a name formed from the phrase 'sign if I can't' – has introduced the world's first video contact centre providing a sign language video service. Called SignVideo, it uses Internet Protocol (IP) technology to improve everyday communication situations for deaf people.

Significant has around eight full-time staff and access to a pool of 25 freelance sign language interpreters which it can call on to work in the contact centre or remotely. Significant's customers include local government authorities, NHS Trusts and, increasingly, the private sector.

There are over 70,000 deaf people in UK who uses British Sign Language (BSL) as their main form of communication. People who have been deaf from birth or an early age may use spoken and written English as a second language, preferring to use BSL as their primary language. This may be due to a lack of access to spoken English in their formative years. Because BSL is a visual language it can be more readily learned by deaf people. Someone who is deaf may lack the confidence to using English in everyday actions like going to the doctor or visiting the local council and therefore this can be a barrier to them. Research by the RNID (The Royal

National Institute for Deaf People) found that 75 per cent of deaf people who use BSL come away from a doctor's visit not fully understanding everything that has been said leading to greater inefficiencies for the NHS caused by repeat visits and/or further deterioration in that person's health.

Recent legislation now requires public sector organisations such as the NHS, central and local government to ensure equal access to their services irrespective of a person's disabilities. When a deaf person contacts, for example, their local council it has to provide the opportunity for them to access council services in the same way as anyone else would. The services of BSL interpreters can be used, but there are only around 300 qualified interpreters in the UK.



Significant started to address this problem by using the latest developments in video technology to make scant interpreter resources available to more people, more of the time. It means an interpreter does not need to be physically present to provide BSL services; via a video conferencing access point, they enable a deaf person to have a conversation. This use of video combined with a BSL interpreter was a major step forward in helping deaf people, but it had limitations.

The service still had to be set up in advance to avoid two or more people trying to access the service at the same time and relied on all parties having access to dedicated video conferencing equipment.

Interpreters work in 20-minute shifts and if a call goes over this time, the next interpreter had to be moved physically in front of the camera to start the next shift. In addition, the process was subject to the varying and inconsistent quality of the video conference connection. Because point-to-point video systems do not distribute any incoming calls, resource management is difficult.

Network Solution

Significant director, Jeff McWhinney, a deaf sign language user himself, was aware of advances in IP technology and its potential to improve the use of video conferencing for deaf people.

“Cisco is by far and away the most technologically advanced company to meet our requirements. The environment we’ve created is the first of its kind in the UK and so we needed to draw on the expertise of a company like Cisco to set it up. For example, I believe we have the first contact centre in the world to enable video prioritisation over voice and you need a company like Cisco that really understands the technology to deliver that kind of innovation.”



Another key aspect of Cisco technology is its in-built security. Significant needs to establish links with its customers through their firewalls and customers need to be sure the communication is highly secure and will not compromise their network security. “When customers see the system is underpinned by Cisco, they recognise the name and the technology and so trust us,” says McWhinney.

At its centre in Blackheath, South East London, Significant has deployed a Cisco Unified Communications system comprising a Cisco IP network infrastructure capable of supporting voice, video and data communication, Cisco CallManager, Cisco VT Advantage video telephony and a 12-seat Cisco Unified Contact Centre.

BSL interpreters in the contact centre sit at PCs and field calls from customers requiring interpretation services. Each PC is equipped with the Cisco VT Advantage software application and camera that integrates to a co-located Cisco Unified phone.

When a call comes into centre it recognises if it is a video call and automatically transferred it to a PC where a video screen opens. After 20 minutes – the maximum time for a single interpretation period – the video call is then transferred to another interpreter in the contact centre, to continue the conversation. Customers using the SignVideo service have the option of using their existing and standard IP video conferencing equipment or video phones installed at their offices in the reception or in dedicated rooms.

The Cisco Unified Communications solution will support video calls over an IP connection and is also being configured to support ISDN-based calls. The system also enables a deaf person to communicate with anyone who has dialled in using an ordinary phone.

The Cisco IPC solution at Significant was implemented by 2e2, a Cisco Gold Certified Partner.

Business Results

Cisco technology is enabling Significant to have a transformative effect on the quality of life for deaf people. McWhinney says, “This is an example of how technology is providing real solutions to real needs. A service like SignVideo can, and is, dramatically changing the lives of deaf people for the good. Without Cisco’s involvement, I think the development of the whole unified service - the design and the structure – would have taken much, much longer.”

PRODUCT LIST

Routing and switching

- Cisco Catalyst 3560 Series Switches
- Cisco 2821 Gatekeeper and IP – IP Gateway
- Cisco 2821 E1 Voice GatewayVideo

Security

- Cisco PIX 500 Series Security Appliances

Video

- Cisco Unified Video Advantage
- Cisco IPVC-3526 H.320 ISDN Gateway
- Cisco VT Advantage video telephony

Voice and IP Communications

- Cisco Unified CommunicationsManager
- Cisco Unified Contact Center Express

In the past, if a deaf person using BSL wanted to make even a simple enquiry at their local council, they would have to contact the local authority at least two weeks (and occasionally up to six weeks) in advance so that they could find a sign language interpreter. With SignVideo, the same person can go to the local authority at any time unannounced and use the Cisco-based video conference facilities to access a BSL interpreter within minutes.

Currently, there are over 30 locations in the London area linked into the SignVideo service at various local councils and health authorities across 15 London Boroughs. Hospitals that have the SignVideo service include Guy's, St Thomas's and The Royal Free. Any deaf person can go into any such place and access the SignVideo service immediately. Significant is starting to

expand the service to other parts of the UK and into the private sector, and has set up a partnership with the National Housing Federation to bring the service to housing associations.

Significant is also looking at making SignVideo available over WiFi and WiMAX. McWhinney recently attended a session at the EU in Brussels and there was no BSL interpreter available so he used his laptop with a desktop videoconferencing facility and the EU Commission's own WiFi connectivity to link into the SignVideo contact centre in London. One of the trained contact centre interpreters was able to ensure that McWhinney participate fully in real time by interpreting the proceedings.

Significant is working with local authorities such as Islington Borough Council to enable SignVideo to be used anywhere in the area over the Council's impending WiMAX service.

There is a substantial cost saving for Significant customers who use the Cisco solution. With SignVideo, customers only pay for the interpreter time they use. Meetings and interviews typically last about 20 minutes and cost around £40-£50. Previously, hiring an interpreter to physically attend a meeting would cost at least £120 even though the actual interpretation time may only be 20 minutes.



The Cisco technology also has benefits for Significant. Reporting on telephony activity is now automated, making it quick and simple to get management information on call activity. This in turn helps Significant manage and plan scarce interpreter skills and resources more effectively.

The Cisco telephony system also helps Significant provide its customers with activity reports faster and more efficiently. For instance, each customer has its own billing structure and the technology enables Significant to automatically log call traffic against each customer.

The scalability of the Cisco technology is an important benefit for Significant because new laws requiring public organisations to ensure deaf people have equal access to information and services mean that more and more organisations will need services like SignVideo.

Significant is considering using Cisco technology to enable an interpreter to provide BSL services from anywhere. Significant will be able to manage interpreter resources even more efficiently by creating virtual contact centres and scaling resources to meet demand. In the future, to make the service more flexible for deaf people, the Cisco technology will help Significant to deliver the SignVideo interpreting service onto mobile phones.

The Cisco-based SignVideo solution has been nominated by public authorities for several technology and service awards. It was a finalist in the e-Government National Awards 2005; its partnership with London Borough of Islington was a runner up in the SOCAL award at the National Customer Services Awards; runner up place at the Government Computing BT Awards; and Significant director, Jeff McWhinney, was nominated and elected as a runner up in The Guardian Public Servant of the Year Award.

SignVideo has been developed with support from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone; and LondonConnects, a London-wide agency bringing together local, regional and central government to support the delivery of the e-government agenda across the capital.

““This is an example of how technology is providing real solutions to real needs. A service like SignVideo can, and is, dramatically changing the lives of deaf people for the good. Without Cisco’s involvement, I think the development of the whole unified service – the design and the structure – would have taken much, much longer.”

Jeff McWhinney, Director, Significant



Americas Headquarters
Cisco Systems, Inc.
170 West Tasman Drive
San Jose, CA 95134-1706
USA
www.cisco.com
Tel: 408 526-4000
800 553-NETS (6387)
Fax: 408 527-0883

Asia Pacific Headquarters
Cisco Systems, Inc.
168 Robinson Road
#28-01 Capital Tower
Singapore 068912
www.cisco.com
Tel: +65 6317 7777
Fax: +65 6317 7799

Europe Headquarters
Cisco Systems International BV
Haarlerbergpark
Haarlerbergweg 13-19
1101 CH Amsterdam
The Netherlands
www-europe.cisco.com
Tel: +31 0 800 020 0791
Fax: +31 0 20 357 1100

Cisco has more than 200 offices worldwide. Addresses, phone numbers, and fax numbers are listed on the Cisco Website at www.cisco.com/go/offices.

©2006 Cisco Systems, Inc. All rights reserved. CCVP, the Cisco Logo, and the Cisco Square Bridge logo are trademarks of Cisco Systems, Inc.; Changing the Way We Work, Live, Play, and Learn is a service mark of Cisco Systems, Inc.; and Access Registrar, Aironet, BPX, Catalyst, CCDA, CCDP, CCIE, CCIP, CCNA, CCNP, CCSP, Cisco, the Cisco Certified Internetwork Expert logo, Cisco IOS, Cisco Press, Cisco Systems, Cisco Systems Capital, the Cisco Systems logo, Cisco Unity, Enterprise/Solver, EtherChannel, EtherFast, EtherSwitch, Fast Step, Follow Me Browsing, FormShare, GigaDrive, GigaStack, HomeLink, Internet Quotient, IOS, IP/TV, iQ Expertise, the iQ logo, iQ Net Readiness Scorecard, iQuick Study, LightStream, Linksys, MeetingPlace, MGX, Networking Academy, Network Registrar, Packet, PIX, ProConnect, RateMUX, ScriptShare, SlideCast, SMARTnet, StackWise, The Fastest Way to Increase Your Internet Quotient, and TransPath are registered trademarks of Cisco Systems, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and certain other countries.

All other trademarks mentioned in this document or Website are the property of their respective owners. The use of the word partner does not imply a partnership relationship between Cisco and any other company. (0609R)

Printed in the UK

The Print Consultancy (01483 771211) / Feb 08