

IT Architecture and planning for Euro Steel



Keeping in touch

Customer: Euro Steel

Website: <http://www.eurosteel.co.za>

Customer Size: tbc

Country or Region: South Africa

Industry: Metal and steel

Partner: Galdon Data

Customer Profile: From humble beginnings, the Euro Steel Group of companies has evolved into one of South Africa's premier stockist and distributor of stainless steel, special steels, aluminium and other corrosion resisting materials – in almost every commercially available form. The group is predominantly positioned in South Africa but has operations in neighbouring countries, all of which combines to service Southern Africa and beyond. Local experience and distribution infrastructure, coupled with its reputation for only representing reputable mills and stocking only quality products are a powerful combination and the foundation of the company's success.

Core values are: Integrity, care, commitment, passion and a win-win approach to all interactions with stakeholders. These values underpin all that the company does.

Software and services:

Lync 2010 Standard Server

Lync 2010 Mediation Server

Euro Steel was using a number of legacy analogue telephone systems and its staff were experiencing difficulties keeping in touch with other branches, as well as with customers.

Situation

About 18 months ago the Group realised that it was investing significant time and effort trying to maintain inter-branch communications, apart from communicating with customers. Internal communication between branches was quite basic and the company was paying various different service providers to maintain old analogue telephone systems with no really possibility of integrating these different systems. The company has nine branches around the country, excluding head office.

"The catalyst was when Euro Steel decided to consolidate its Gauteng site," said Thomas Fowler, Outsource CIO at Euro Steel. "At the same time, we decided to look at the communications infrastructure. The evaluation included discussions with several PABX providers, but they could only suggest an updated PABX, with a line between other sites. What we were offered was very basic functionality."

Solution

At the same time the company was reviewing its Microsoft Enterprise Agreement.

"Barry Neethling, of First Technologies, asked if we had seen Lync," went on Fowler. "We knew of the Office Communicator platform and he explained that this was the next development and was a genuine PABX replacement. He introduced us to Galdon Data who took us through the capabilities. It's not just the voice, it's the video, the document sharing, collaboration, sharing and so on."

Phase 1 entailed setting up the entire Wadeville site of 150 people to run on Lync, talking to each other and making outbound telephone calls. The lifeblood of Euro Steel is the telephone system – without a phone it cannot easily take orders. It is still the primary way that customers communicate with the company, unlike other manufacturing companies where the orders come through the fax and can be dealt with and processed at leisure. Euro Steel's business is live and takes place on the telephone.



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So getting the phones right was vitally important. At the bare minimum, being able to make and receive telephone calls were priorities. The next step was to leverage the other advantages of the product to make the system more sophisticated.

"We are now rolling out the next phase which is disseminating Lync to our other branches in Durban, Cape Town and so on," commented Fowler.

Benefits

The biggest advantage is that inter-branch calls are free and once all the branches are on Lync, the company plans to build quite a large CRM capability into its ERP system which will enhance its ability to communicate with its customers.

"We want our customers to see a difference. They have always had the ability to phone us and we don't want that to change, said Fowler. "However, our reliability has changed for the better, as we used to have terrible problems with the exchange going down and then our customers not being able to get through to us.

"There have been a few niggles which revolve around our internal capacity to use and support this technology, as well as ensuring that our staff members are properly trained on the new system.

"The screen-sharing capabilities have also been enormously helpful. If something goes wrong the internal IT support engineer asks the user to share his or her screen and can see exactly what is going on and fix it. So support is easier and this is a bonus where the branches are concerned."

Euro Steel is also finding that document sharing and collaboration are also very useful. With the previous system there was no way that two people, in different branches, could work on the same document at the same time. With document sharing that is no longer a problem.

"We shall be rolling out the rest of the programme in the next few months and will be doing a fair amount of staff training so that everyone knows how the system works and what it is capable of achieving," concluded Fowler.

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