



Member Services Organization Improves Communications While Cutting Costs

Overview

Country or Region: Canada

Industry: Healthcare

Customer Profile

OACCAC is a member services organization that serves to advance excellence in community healthcare on behalf of CCACs and the clients they serve.

Business Situation

OACCAC wanted to improve its communications services while decreasing costs.

Solution

OACCAC deployed Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007 R2 to take advantage of audio conferencing bridges integrated into the server and additional voice capabilities.

Benefits

- Save up to CAN\$75,000 (U.S.\$59,325) annually on audio conferencing services
- Avoid additional spending on PBX-based solutions
- Enhance voice and conferencing capabilities
- Streamline communications
- Improve IT services

“OACCAC is spending \$75,000 on an audio conferencing service. I expect that most all of these costs will go away.”

Dean Gillan, Technical Architect, OACCAC

The Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres (OACCAC) is a member services organization that serves the needs of 14 Community Care Access Centres (CCAC) across Ontario. Responsible for providing 8,000 users in 250 offices with IT and networking services, the organization wanted to reduce costs and improve the communications capabilities provided to users. OACCAC employees were already using the instant messaging, presence, and Web conferencing capabilities of Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007 to reduce travel and improve customer service. OACCAC is now deploying Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2 to take advantage of the improved audio conferencing and voice capabilities. By hosting audio conferencing bridges on its servers, the organization will expand the use of conferencing and save as much as CAN\$75,000 (U.S.\$59,325) annually.

“Technically, using a separate audio conference works fine, but it does have limitations, especially in terms of determining the active speaker or being able to record the session and play back meetings for those that couldn’t attend.”

Ken Sutcliffe, Director of IT Services, OACCAC

Situation

The Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres (OACCAC) is a member services organization designed to advance excellence in community healthcare on behalf of Community Care Access Centres (CCACs) and the clients they serve. CCACs are local organizations established by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care that provide access to government-funded home and community services, as well as long-term care homes, to clients throughout the province. There are 14 CCAC main offices in various jurisdictions throughout Ontario, and 250 secondary offices that serve as local points of contact.

Along with physicians, hospital teams, and other healthcare providers, CCAC case managers and care coordinators work to ensure that clients are able to live independently at home with the support of healthcare professionals, or to help them apply for admission to a long-term care home, if needed. CCACs also offer programs for those with specialized or acute health care issues, for example, individuals with brain injuries, or children with specialized health needs.

Because coordinating these cases requires effective communications among offices, OACCAC wanted to find a better way to connect the staff of the member organizations with each other and with the information they need. “If you think of the geography, especially in Northern Ontario where a remote office can be two to four hours away from a central office, you can easily see why we needed a way for our people to work more effectively,” says Dean Gillan, Technical Architect, OACCAC.

To offer staff additional communications options within one unified environment, OACCAC deployed Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007, one of the

cornerstones of unified communications solutions from Microsoft, providing instant messaging (IM), presence, voice communications, as well as audio, video and Web conferencing. “We knew that a software-based model of unified communications would help us streamline communications—bringing together e-mail, instant messaging, phone, and conferencing, making it more intuitive for staff,” says Ken Sutcliffe, Director of IT Services, OACCAC.

The new software was widely adopted by users to improve communications and reduce the need for travel. Previously, to facilitate communication between OACCAC and member organizations, staff traveled to meet in person with colleagues throughout the province. While face-to-face meetings continue to be important, features in Office Communications Server 2007 enable executives to meet in person less frequently as they are able to take advantage of virtual meetings. As a result, travel time has been reduced.

Solution

With this unified communications solution already in place, OACCAC will now implement Office Communications Server 2007 R2, to enhance the original solution with additional conferencing and voice functionality.

The new solution will support audio conferencing bridges on the server. This new capability means that OACCAC will no longer require an external service for audio conferencing. With this support, OACCAC users will be able to participate in audio conferences from a mobile phone or other landline phones while they are out of the office. IT also can open up audio conferences to external users. Software-based audio conferences hosted on Office Communications Server 2007 R2 provide a familiar user interface so the organizer can easily initiate a conference, add or remove a

“Instead of looking for mobility solutions from PBX vendors, this becomes our mobility solution. We expect people will naturally use the softphone while they are out of the office so we don’t need to invest in a PBX-based softphone.”

Ken Sutcliffe, Director of IT Services, OACCAC

participant, and take advantage of features such as muting participants or transferring the call to a mobile phone.

OACCAC plans to deploy additional voice features, including Delegation, Team Calling, and Response Groups. Using Delegation, a manager can select an administrator or team member to manage their phone line while they are away. With Team Calling, team members can forward calls to other team members when they are out of the office. For OACCAC, this is very important because employees regularly travel around Ontario to visit clients and their families at home and in hospitals, as well as doctors and other healthcare agencies.

OACCAC will deploy Response Group functionality for the help desk so that calls can be routed to the first available agent. Response groups can be set up on Office Communications Server 2007 R2 at no additional charge.

Desktop sharing functionality is now built into the Microsoft Office Communicator client. With this functionality, users can escalate from an IM chat to a desktop-sharing session with just one click. Previously, users had to initiate a Microsoft Office Live Meeting session in order to share their desktop with others.

Deployment of the new solution is expected to be straightforward. “We will deploy a parallel environment for Office Communications Server 2007 R2,” explains Gillan. “Then we can selectively move users over to the new environment without affecting existing users.”

OACCAC will develop a Rollout Kit for users internally, using Microsoft documentation. “We will look at features we want to highlight—or major differences and highlight those areas in the rollout kit,” explains

Sutcliffe. “Then we’ll supplement it with usage scenarios that are important to the business.” OACCAC finds that these kits provide an easy way to help users become familiar with new technologies.

Benefits

OACCAC expects to see significant benefits as it deploys Office Communications Server 2007 R2. The benefits include costs savings, improved communications among users, and improved IT services.

Reduced Costs

OACCAC currently uses an external audio conferencing service, which costs the organization about CAN\$75,000 (U.S.\$59,325) per year. The organization expects to be able to reduce this cost significantly by hosting audio conferences on Office Communications Server 2007 R2. “OACCAC is spending \$75,000 on an audio conferencing service. I expect that most all of these costs will go away,” notes Gillan. “I expect we will show a fairly good cost savings just from that component of the installation. It should be enough to pay for the entire deployment.”

The savings will be slightly less than the full \$75,000 per year because OACCAC will still incur costs for toll-free access for external participants and network access charges for the conferencing line. Sutcliffe adds, “We wanted to start to offset some of the costs that we were incurring in setting up a Live Meeting for content and a separate audio conference for audio.”

With Office Communications Server 2007 R2, OACCAC also will be able to reduce the dependence on its Private Branch Exchange (PBX) solution, especially with mobile users. “Instead of looking for mobility solutions from PBX vendors, this becomes our mobility solution,” explains Sutcliffe. “We expect people will naturally use the softphone while

they are out of the office so we don't need to invest in a PBX-based softphone.”

Streamlined Communications

The new features offered in Office Communications Server 2007 R2 make communications more user friendly than the previous options. These capabilities will improve communications and drive increased adoption.

OACCAC will use Live Meeting with integrated audio conferencing to ensure that everyone is able to participate in meetings. “We are able to include people who would normally not be afforded the opportunity to travel,” explains Sutcliffe. “We can also record the session and play back meetings to people who were not able to attend.”

Users also will find that audio conferencing on the server is easier to manage. Audio conferences can be set up using the Microsoft Office Outlook® messaging and collaboration client in the same way as Live Meeting Web conferences. “One of the benefits is that we can see who is actually in the meeting. You don't have to wonder who joined or who dropped off,” notes Gillan. “And users see these benefits immediately without having to learn any new tools.”

Desktop sharing is another area that is compelling for OACCAC users. “Although we do have desktop sharing in Live Meeting, it is a separate client so there are extra steps required to begin sharing,” explains Gillan. “We won't have to use another tool now.”

OACCAC uses Live Meeting to improve training opportunities for staff. “We will provide in-person training at their place of work, but they can also have a rich training experience using Live Meeting,” explains Sutcliffe. “Some training opportunities are enhanced through video and we can provide those with online educational videos.”

Improved Operational Efficiency IT Services

Using many of the new capabilities offered in Office Communications Server 2007 R2, OACCAC can operate more efficiently. OACCAC expects help-desk services to improve significantly with the new capabilities. “We're expecting a big benefit from a help-desk perspective,” explains Gillan. “If somebody sends an IM to the help desk saying, ‘I have some problems,’ it's very easy to start desktop sharing and resolve the issue. We can do it with Live Meeting, but it's a lot easier with it built into the Office Communicator client.”

Overall these benefits will provide a significant return on investment for OACCAC. The organization expects to continue to improve this return as additional capabilities are deployed across the 250 supported offices.

For More Information

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For more information about Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres (OACCAC) products and services, call (416) 750-1720 or visit the Web site at: www.ccac-ont.ca

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 - Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2
 - Microsoft Office Communicator 2007

Hardware

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 - Polycom CX200 USB phone
 - Jabra GN2000 NC USB headset
 - Plantronics SupraPlus Wideband USB headset