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Andrew Badstubner
Senior Director of Application Development
Cbeyond

All-IP Service Provider Achieves 99% Provisioning Flowthrough

THE CHALLENGE

▶ Cbeyond is a company on the fast track. As one of the world’s first 100% Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service providers, the company has been a hit among its small-business customers by delivering integrated packages of local and long distance voice, mobile, and broadband Internet services with extraordinary customer service.

Cbeyond has distinguished itself for tailoring its business to what it calls “an entrepreneurial class” of customers who move frequently, expect uninterrupted service, and need the full spectrum of “big business” offerings. Thus, the company has been expanding its all-IP portfolio to include: high-speed data, mobile, email, fax-to-email, voicemail, web hosting, secure backup, file sharing, BlackBerry® access, conferencing, managed firewall, virtual private network, and local, long distance, and international voice.

Cbeyond rolled out service to its first market in 2001 and quickly began extending its customer base into more major U.S. metro areas. Within just a few years, however, it found that it was exhausting its inventory and provisioning tools.

Outgrowing existing operations

The systems and spreadsheets that Cbeyond had been relying on to reserve and assign network channels, circuits, and IP addresses were beginning to affect its provisioning speed and accuracy, because those tools made it too time consuming, if not impossible, to assure data integrity, automate the provisioning workflow, and deliver accurate, consolidated views of network assets.

Given its customers’ needs for sophisticated services at affordable prices, and their penchant to relocate, Cbeyond is extremely sensitive about data integrity.

Data quality and automated flowthrough are critical elements of success, because they directly impact Cbeyond’s ability to move customers on, off, and around the network and to make quick, accurate service changes.

Seeking the right IP functionality and the right vendor

Cbeyond evaluated all of the major inventory suppliers in the marketplace. As a VoIP company, it was not only interested in supporting its current and future technology mix and automating its fulfillment processes, but also integrating IP address management into its provisioning domain. And it wanted all of that functionality from a proven vendor.

Cbeyond selected Telcordia® Granite Inventory, an off-the-shelf application for automated resource management and provisioning. With its modular functionality, it provides an intelligent, automated way to view, track, assign, and activate multitechnology, multilayer network assets, and manage IP addresses. “A key decision point in choosing Granite [Inventory] was the strength of its API,” says Cbeyond’s Senior Director of Application Development Andrew Badstubner. “All of our customer transactions would flow through that API, so product stability was extremely important to us.”

THE TELCORDIA RESPONSE

► Telcordia Professional Services consultants began the engagement with a two-week, on-site Project Impact Assessment. They met with a cross-functional Cbeyond team, interviewing users and system operators, holding workshops, and collaborating on high-level requirements.

The Cbeyond stakeholders found the process extremely valuable. It got all users on the same page, using a common vocabulary and common definitions, which greatly facilitated the actual model-building stage of the engagement.

Perfecting the massive data migration

Following the initial assessment and network modeling, one of the most pivotal contributions from the Telcordia experts was in working with Cbeyond to develop a data migration strategy.

Telcordia and Cbeyond cataloged the massive amount of data in the old systems and flat files, and built reconciliation logic. They then set up a testing-training environment with actual data and realistic data volumes. Dry-runs of the data migration and system turn-up were carried out — not once or twice, but more than ten times — providing ample time to correct issues related to the automated workflow, familiarize users with the system, and rigorously test the ability of Granite Inventory to handle a full production load from day one. The Cbeyond users were, ultimately, able to perform the entire data migration in a matter of hours.

A “very unusual” cutover experience

All of the preparation paid off during the actual, over-night turn-up. By the start of business the next morning, the data was flowing smoothly. “When the [Granite Inventory] system finally went live, we had no issues. That’s very unusual. We were delighted,” says Badstubner.

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As expected, 99% of Cbeyond transactions, IP address assignments, and circuit assignments immediately began flowing through Granite Inventory using Cbeyond's own capacity management algorithms, which were easily integrated into the process.

THE RESULTS

► The company credits the system for delivering numerous tangible and intangible business benefits:

- **Reliability** – Cbeyond has found Granite Inventory to be more stable than any other inventory system it has used, which gives the company confidence in the integrity of the data that is reserved and assigned through the system. In addition, when it came time to upgrade to a new release of Granite Inventory, the cut-over process was, once again, extremely efficient.
- **Operational Efficiency** – “Using the Granite Inventory APIs, we're able to virtually guarantee consistency in the way we allocate our network resources,” says Badstubner. Cbeyond is also able to handle all of the model creation and maintenance in house, which contributes to keeping the cost-of-ownership as low as possible.
- **Cost Savings** – Automating the tasks of reserving and assigning both network capacity and IP addresses is producing measurable savings in labor and time by significantly reducing errors and the need for human intervention.
- **Customer Satisfaction** – By mid-2007, Cbeyond had expanded to more than 31,000 customers in eight major U.S. metro areas. It gained more than 2,000 new customers in the second quarter of 2007 alone, topping its previous growth record, while enjoying a stable, 99% customer retention rate. Maintaining this level of growth is difficult to achieve without Granite Inventory's ability to provide accurate and timely information about the network to minimize service disruptions.
- **Reputation** – Cbeyond's ability to sustain fast growth and consistent performance is attracting attention. Besides word-of-mouth referrals, it has earned: a #22 ranking on Deloitte's 2006 “Technology Fast 500” list and is the second fastest growing company in Georgia; the Medical Association of Atlanta's Cooper Award for outstanding customer support; a “Best Performer” spot in Fortune Magazine's 2007 Investor Guide; and recognition by Frost & Sullivan as a best-in-class IP integrated service provider.

Overall, Badstubner reports, “The feedback from our team was that the Telcordia consultants really understand what they're doing, and Granite Inventory is delivering on all of its promises for reliable, automated, extremely cost-efficient fulfillment.”

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For more information about Telcordia Technologies, contact your local account executive, or you can reach us at:
+1 800.521.2673 (U.S. and Canada)
+44 (0)20 7632 4450 (Europe)
+1 732.699.5800 (all other countries)
info@telcordia.com
www.telcordia.com