

Case study

Datalink Networks targets emerging market for Lync



By leveraging HP technology and support, Datalink demonstrates its leadership and innovation—and delivers business transformation

Industry

Unified communications

Objective

Capitalize on emerging unified communications market

Approach

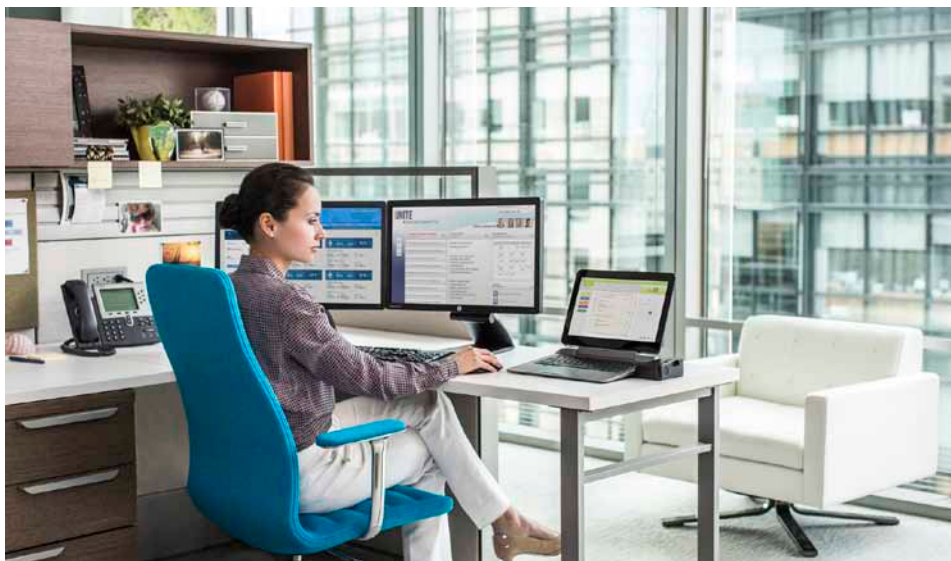
Partner with HP to create a bundled unified communications solution

IT matters

- Enhanced telecommunications functionality and excellent voice quality, at a lower cost than comparable traditional telephony systems
- Improved network manageability protects platform performance and integrity

Business matters

- Able to respond quickly to unified communications opportunities and meet customer needs, maximizing revenue opportunities and market share



“We can offer an end-to-end Lync platform that eliminates many of the variables that might otherwise impact project timelines or costs.”

— Donald Wisdom, President, Datalink Networks

For regional IT services provider Datalink Networks, Microsoft® Lync® represents a tremendous opportunity: it allows Datalink customers to replace or enhance their traditional telephony systems in a way that is cost-effective and adds exciting new functionality—without compromising quality. Datalink is partnering with HP to offer an end-to-end Lync solution that leverages HP Networking technology to optimize the platform performance and user experience.

Datalink Networks, a regional IT services provider based in Southern California, pays close attention to technology trends. New technologies disrupt the status quo, and disruptions play to Datalink's strengths as a nimble, adaptive, and customer responsive systems integrator.

When Datalink discovered Lync's great productivity benefits to an organization over traditional legacy telephony systems, company management made a decision to invest heavily in the training and development of Lync engineers and sales consultants. The company also invested heavily in marketing to spread awareness of its Lync capabilities with its clients and HP contacts throughout the region.

This proved to be the right decision, as Lync's popularity has grown rapidly in the communication market, eclipsing old market leaders in the enterprise, commercial, and public sector segments over the last five years. The early decision to invest in the right technology has helped Datalink Networks to become the leading Lync provider in Southern California today.

HP Networking: excited about partnering

Datalink Networks began working with HP shortly after its founding in 1988.

In the early years, the company dealt primarily with HP servers and storage hardware; most of the networking gear the company originally provided and supported was Cisco. Things began to change in the mid-2000s as customers demanded networking solutions that were less proprietary and provided greater value. "We were no longer entirely satisfied with the Cisco portfolio of switches and routers we were selling at the time," explains Donald Wisdom, President, Datalink Networks. "We decided to look at other options and quickly discovered HP."

Wisdom arranged to meet with the HP Networking product development team on a visit to HP Networks headquarters in Roseville, CA. He got a first-hand look at the company's current offerings and its future plans. "HP rolled out the red carpet," Wisdom says. "They were very excited about partnering with us. And we loved the commitment to open standards and value that we saw in both the existing technology and future technology roadmaps."

Datalink decided to add HP switches to its portfolio. "It was an extraordinary time," Wisdom recalls. "We could walk into a customer site, and replace their existing network gear with hardware that offered better functionality and performance, at a third of the cost. We helped many of our clients transition out of Cisco and into HP. Over the next several years, as Datalink continued to represent HP Networking products, HP expanded its enterprise network offerings, added wireless technology, and integrated networking into its server and storage platforms.

Industry buzz leads to new opportunity

"We first became interested in unified communications around 2008," Wisdom explains. At the time, Datalink's product lines included Avaya telecommunications systems; they were "very good," Wisdom notes, but also "very expensive, very proprietary, and limited to voice only."

And "very expensive" wasn't good enough for Datalink. It wanted to give its customers the functionality supported by high-end telecom, but at a much lower cost. Enter the power of Microsoft's Lync application to unify many different forms of communication under one software platform and completely transform the corporate communications market.

Datalink as a long-time Microsoft partner—had been implementing Microsoft Server, Exchange, and Active Directory® since the early 2000s—and was watching carefully the development of Lync inside Microsoft. "We started to hear buzz about Lync," Wisdom says, "and we realized something important was happening. The telecommunications industry hadn't changed much in thirty years. Even with voice over IP, it's the same old telephony. But Lync was truly different. We knew, right away, that we needed to get in on the ground floor."

Lync also looked like a product with tremendous market opportunity. "Exchange has over 80% of the messaging market," Wisdom says. "That's huge. It meant we could walk into eight out of every ten of our clients, and there was an opportunity to help them transition out of legacy voice systems and into Lync."



HP Networking a critical Lync asset

As Datalink began developing its Lync capabilities, it realized that its partnership with HP was a critical asset. “HP Networking and servers allow us to offer a bundled Lync solution,” Wisdom says. “We can offer an end-to-end Lync platform that eliminates many of the variables that might otherwise impact Lync performance.”

For servers, Datalink typically selects either HP BladeSystem c7000 Enclosures or HP ProLiant DL380 Servers, depending on the customer’s size and other project specifications.

For network switches, Datalink sometimes implements devices from the HP 7500 Switch Series, but most often, the company’s Lync architects recommend the HP 5400 zl Switch Series. Like the HP 7500, the HP 5400 provides minimum 1 Gbps across all ports, supports POE and can be centrally managed by HP’s Intelligent Management Center platform. “HP has embraced Software Defined Network (SDN) standards and has released an early SDN app supporting Lync,” Wisdom notes.

We’re adding the HP SDN app to our Lync offerings, because it improves Lync quality of services throughout the network and that is essential to a successful Lync deployment.

Partnering with HP also helps Datalink in other ways. HP assists Datalink with marketing its Lync capabilities, for example. And being an HP certified planning and design partner makes it easier for Datalink to quote public sector jobs

through the federal government’s General Services Administration (GSA) website.

Happy customers today

Datalink Networks experience suggests that organizations become interested in unified communications for different reasons. Sometimes Datalink suggests Lync as a less-costly alternative to other communications solutions, such as dedicated video conferencing technology. Lync can enable companies to add more robust conferencing capabilities, without requiring them to first upgrade to expensive new handsets. For other customers, Datalink can extend the life of legacy phone systems, or replace expensive outdated messaging servers, or replace expensive analog and digital lines with internet SIP trunks.

“Our partnership with HP helps us capitalize on Lync opportunities.”

—Donald Wisdom, President, Datalink Networks

Regardless of why a customer becomes interested in Lync, however, Datalink typically suggests it start with a pilot. That way, the customer can experience Lync’s quality, versatility, and ease-of-use first-hand before migrating off its legacy telecommunications platform.

For example, Datalink recently worked with an agricultural trade association to modernize its legacy Avaya communication platform.

Customer at a glance

Hardware

- HP 5400 zl Switch Series
- HP 7500 Switch Series
- HP BladeSystem c7000 Enclosure
- HP ProLiant DL380 Server

Software

- Microsoft® Lync®
- HP Software-Defined Network controller

The customer first obtained a quote from another vendor to upgrade the Avaya platform, but the price seemed far too high. So it approached Datalink to ask about unified communications. Datalink conducted a pilot and training session and then—when the pilot proved a success—transitioned the entire organization onto Lync.

Today, the company's customer service agents can work from home. This saves them thousands of dollars per month in office space. The company also likes the Lync platform's ease of use: employees working remotely can be contacted through a simple four-digit extension, for example, just as if they were sitting in the corporate office building. These benefits underscore the power of Lync to change the way companies communicate.

The best part of this is still ahead. As Microsoft rebrands Lync as "Skype for Business" the focus on universal communication on any device, anywhere, with anyone, is the direction we are headed. It is very exciting to build these systems with Microsoft and HP.

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4AA5-6913ENW, January 2015

