WhitePaper

How to Significantly Reduce the Cost of PBX and Voice Mail Administration

SEVEN REASONS WHY VOICE ADMINISTRATION SYSTEMS COST YOUR ORGANIZATION MONEY, AND HOW UNIFIED VOICE ADMINISTRATION CAN HELP.

Executive Summary

As companies continuously strive to decrease operating costs, telecom expenses are increasingly coming under scrutiny. An entire industry has developed around the management of carrier selection, invoice reconciliation, and billing dispute resolution. Yet, for most organizations, this is just a portion of the cost-savings opportunity. Voice system administration processes can be streamlined and standardized to save significant dollars or eliminate that portion of managed service contracts.

As VoIP deployments have increased their reach within an enterprise, voice system management and administration have increased in complexity. Administration tools, originally developed for legacy TDM environments, are often focused on single systems and don't provide enough visibility to allow administrators to analyze historical data, audit administrator actions, or review and troubleshoot related systems. As a result, telecom managers, busy focusing on day-to-day management tasks, may not even be aware that data inconsistencies, information gaps, or process inefficiencies exist. Problems such as these can rapidly become significant expenses.

This white paper examines 7 common problems with current voice system administration processes and how centralizing or unifying the administration of PBX, voice messaging systems, and other related systems can significantly reduce costs and improve productivity.

Voice Administration Systems Cost You Money Because:

1. Staffing and workload assignments are uneven and don't optimize various skill sets

With most voice administration systems, it is difficult to assign security rights and privileges based on roles and it is nearly impossible to capture and analyze data in order to answer questions, such as:

► *How many more telecom administrators and managers will be needed to handle anticipated growth?*

► *How many activities do administrators in the field handle versus administrators at corporate headquarters?*

► *Are administrator roles defined in the most efficient manner?*

► *But, with a unified voice administration system and the capability to maintain an audit trail of*

How to Significantly Reduce the Cost of PBX and Voice Mail Administration

all administrator activities, this type of analysis becomes possible. Managers can:

▶ *Track how many MACs were processed within a given time period and by which administrator*

▶ *Review the type and frequency of administrator actions*

▶ *Analyze trends and use data as input to workload distribution, role determination, staffing needs, and budget forecasting*

By shifting responsibilities or rebalancing workloads, telecom managers can save costs by ensuring all administrators are working at capacity, by shifting more basic functions to interns or lower-paid administrators, and by avoiding the costs of adding additional administrators.

2. Password resets are simple to execute yet expensive to process

Many corporate IT help desks receive a significant and recurring volume of voice mail password reset requests. To maintain the security of voice messaging systems, these requests often have to be routed to the telecom administration group for processing. This additional step increases the cost and creates a delay for the end user which could be avoided if the IT help desk personnel could securely handle this simple request while the caller was on the phone.

An administration framework with multiple, permission-based administrator roles and a limited-capability web interface allows the fulfillment of these password reset requests to be offloaded to the IT help desk. Off-loading the password reset function:

▶ *Saves dollars in processing time*

▶ *Allows specialized telecom administrators to focus more on higher-value tasks*

▶ *Enables help desk associates to fulfill customer requests while they are on the phone with the user—reducing customer downtime*

Plagued by a high volume of voice mail password reset calls from employees, a major airline used their unified voice administration system to implement a Web-based password reset application for the IT help desk. By leveraging role-based administrator security, the application allows help desk associates to reset voice mail passwords but not to change any other aspects of the user's profile. Since implementing the solution, 75 percent of the airline's inbound trouble calls are now resolved by the help desk on the first call without the need to transfer the request to the telecom department.

Pushing the password reset responsibility to the end user can reduce costs even further. A technology company determined that each password reset in its telecom network cost between $50 and $100 to process. In one recent year, the company processed more than 18,000 password reset requests. Shifting to an automated, self-service password reset application saved the

3. Multiple administration systems require redundant data entry

Provisioning end users with telecom assets is a labor-intensive, time-consuming task. Directory numbers, phone sets, classes of service, voice mail settings, distribution lists, passwords— each variable must be configured and assigned appropriately to the subscriber. PBX and voice messaging systems must be configured separately, requiring duplicate data entry.

For companies with multi-vendor communication environments, the complexity of provisioning is compounded. Often administration teams are organized in silos according to vendor. Training and managing multiple teams of administrators who use separate administration tools adds considerable time and expense to enterprise telecom maintenance.

Unified voice system administration can significantly streamline the creation and maintenance of user data, profiles, and lists:

▶ *Related systems are presented in a global view and linked together*

▶ *A change to a field like "Subscriber Name" is automatically propagated across all relevant PBX or voice messaging systems*

▶ *A simplified, point-and-click user interface requires fewer keystrokes and reduces the cost of human error*

▶ *Redundant, manual data entry is virtually eliminated, saving significant time plus the costs associated with maintaining multiple software packages and multiple processes*

4. Large-scale changes are huge undertakings, requiring weekend or evening work

Large-scale projects, resulting from situations like organizational changes or employee turnover, place additional stress on the provisioning process. Because these large projects are often relegated to off-peak evening and weekend hours to minimize disruption, they also typically incur expensive overtime costs.

The reason large projects create difficulties is that many voice administration systems require MACs to be processed one change at a time, for each voice mailbox, phone, or user. They don't allow for simultaneous changes for large blocks of directory numbers or mailboxes. Instead, manual processes for user list creation, MACs, password resets, etc. must be executed repetitively, and there are no opportunities to leverage economies of scale.

> *At a small university, telecom administrators must annually prepare for a new crop of students in the summer session, and an entirely new class of 2,300 students in the fall. Assigned phones and voice mailboxes must be deleted and rebuilt before each summer and fall session. Prior to using a unified voice administration system, the telecom group dedicated five administrators full-time for a two-week period to complete the task. Since moving to the unified system, one telecom administrator is able to provision the students in just two days.*

Unified voice administration systems help automate and process multiple, similar transactions. This automation can add tremendous scalability and bandwidth so that fewer administrators can handle a larger volume of activities without the need for overtime expenses. Examples of these tools include:

- ► *Use of templates for mailboxes, phones, or other resources*
- ► *Ability to create multiple users at once by utilizing information supplied in an external file or spreadsheet*
- ► *Automated resource management features to reserve specific ranges of directory numbers or voice mailboxes for designated groups of users*
- ► *Ability to create, save, and schedule projects for execution at a later date*

5. Voice mail distribution lists are immediately outdated and hard to maintain

Voice mail distribution lists proliferate in large organizations. Seemingly simple tasks—putting the right people on the right lists and keeping the lists up-to-date—can quickly become a headache for telecom departments in large organizations, especially when manual processes are usually required.

With a unified voice administration system that relates directory information, voice messaging, and message networking systems, any changes to user profile information that impact membership are automatically propagated and reflected in the lists to which that user subscribes. Moreover, administrators can:

- ► *View all enterprise distribution lists*
- ► *View membership rosters*
- ► *Compare lists to see membership differences*
- ► *See to which lists an individual user is subscribed*
- ► *Determine if users belong to the appropriate lists*

> *Before implementing a unified voice administration system, a pharmaceutical company managed voice mail distribution lists manually. With the manual process, telecom administrators could handle a maximum of 200 lists—inadequate for the business's rapid growth. The manual process was also error prone, and it was difficult to know to which lists users were subscribed.*
>
> *After implementing a unified voice administration system with an automated list management solution, the telecom department was able to scale its list capacity. In the next two years, the number of lists rose to 800 and 1,800, respectively. Today, the company automatically synchronizes over 3,000 lists on a nightly basis. The company anticipates savings will top $1 million over a five-year period.*

Automating list management reduces both hard and soft costs while improving productivity. Because maintaining list membership requires less time and effort, the associated processing costs also decrease. Simultaneously, administrators can manage more lists than before. No longer are lists abandoned and recreated when they become out of date. There is no longer a need for costly workarounds such as having an administrative assistant manually leave messages for designated groups of people.

6. Troubleshooting and customer response times are too slow, contributing to customer downtime

Inevitably, a telecom administrator receives the call from an internal customer, "My voice mail is not working." Even diagnosing relatively minor issues, such as a user's lack of access to voice mail, the inability to dial long-distance, or an inability to receive messages from a distribution list, first requires triage to determine which platform or system is involved or to which phone the user is assigned. And if the problem isn't fixed the first time, the next administrator may have to determine what actions were already taken, often with no audit trails available.

With unified voice system administration, troubleshooting becomes simpler, faster, and less costly:

► *Audit trails reveal what recent changes may have impacted the user. Reports include old and new values for the changed fields, making it easier to identify the source of the problem*

► *Viewing multiple, related records across different systems allows administrators to quickly see if there are discrepancies in settings or configurations*

► *A single-point interface eliminates the need to deal with different vendor applications to resolve the problem*

How to Significantly Reduce the Cost of PBX and Voice Mail Administration

> ► *The ability to automatically compare the problem phone or voice mailbox to one that is working makes troubleshooting easier and faster*

As a result, problems are diagnosed and resolved much more quickly, with lower operational costs. Customers are back up and running faster, reducing downtime costs.

7. Asset inventories are unreliable and result in over-purchasing

You can't successfully manage what you can't see. The distributed nature of telecom networks makes it challenging to gather and track information that can facilitate effective asset management. Without a single, unified point for administering all platforms and devices across the network, it's difficult to maintain an accurate inventory of devices and systems.

Telecom assets represent a significant capital investment for a company. But as organizations change and employees move around, it becomes difficult to track the current status of telecom resources—where each piece of equipment is physically located and to whom it has been assigned.

As a result, when planning for organizational growth and considering how to expand telecom services, there is often a tendency to simply throw more equipment at the problem. New equipment is purchased to accommodate new staff and new offices, without knowledge of how much existing equipment is being utilized.

Because unified voice system administration provides a unified view of related systems, getting a detailed accounting of users, mailboxes, phone sets, etc., is merely a matter of running a simple report. Moreover, when the administration system provides resource management capability, mailboxes and direct numbers can automatically be aged as users leave the company or reserved for when a new building comes online. Direct results include:

- ► *Lower telecom equipment costs*
- ► *A more efficient use of existing telecom equipment*
- ► *The ability to better plan for growth*

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How to Significantly Reduce the Cost of PBX and Voice Mail Administration

Conclusion

As the number of VoIP deployments increase, the complexity of voice system administration processes also increase. What's more concerning is that the software tools for managing these processes has not kept up to pace. Redundancy commonly exists in staffing, user provisioning, troubleshooting, reporting, and list management activities. A lack of integration, automation, or scalability exposes administrative teams to human error, backlogs, and unknown security risks.

In this white paper, we have highlighted 7 of the most common problems with typical voice administration systems:

1. *Staffing and workload assignments are uneven and don't optimize various skill sets.*
2. *Password resets are simple to execute yet expensive to process.*
3. *Multiple administration systems require redundant data entry.*
4. *Large-scale changes are huge undertakings, requiring weekend or evening work.*
5. *Voice mail distribution lists are immediately outdated and hard to maintain.*
6. *Troubleshooting and customer response times are too slow, contributing to customer downtime.*
7. *Asset inventories are unreliable and result in over-purchasing.*

All of these problems drive up costs, yet the issues are often hidden below the surface as telecom administrators and managers wrestle with the day-to-day burdens of managing MACs, on-boarding and off-boarding, and end-user troubleshooting.

As shown in multiple case studies, unified voice system administration, combined with an examination of current processes, enables telecom departments to achieve visibility across their environment, improve customer service, increase security and accountability, and simplify administration processes—all while realizing significant cost savings.

For more information on Unimax's Unified Voice Administration products and services, please contact us at (800) 886-0390 or by email at TellMeMore@unimax.com. Visit us online at www.unimax.com.