

Pan-European Contact Center Brings Sony Closer to Customers

HP success story



Sony Europe has worked with HP Services to develop a pan-European customer-care infrastructure based on Cisco IP Contact Center products. Already connecting 100 agents at Sony contact centers in Belgium and the Netherlands, the virtual infrastructure enables customers to access expert, local-language support for all Sony consumer brands and also provides a 700-seat IP telephony network. While helping Sony to enhance customer care, advance CRM, and cross-sell products, the converged environment consolidates contact centers and telephony, which also lowers costs.

The Sony logo, featuring the word 'SONY' in a bold, black, sans-serif font, is centered between two horizontal red bars.

Electronics and entertainment giant Sony Corporation has one of the strongest brands in the world. Renowned for such icons as Walkman, Trinitron, Vaio, and PlayStation, Sony is a synonym for excellence and innovation in consumer electronics. But as competitors erode its dominance of an increasingly commoditized market, Sony is striving to strengthen sales and profitability by nurturing customer intimacy—and loyalty.

Sony's strategy is to simplify and enrich the consumer experience by providing a continuum of interconnected products, from pocket-sized radios and digital cameras to wall-spanning plasma television screens.

Sony Europe, a subsidiary of Tokyo-based Sony Corporation, is extending this vision of innovation and integration to customer service and customer relationship management (CRM). Working with HP Services, Sony Europe has developed a pan-European customer contact center and CRM environment based on Cisco Systems Internet Protocol Contact Center (IPCC), IP telephony, and converged networking products.

As prime contractor and systems integrator, HP Services collaborated with Sony Europe personnel to plan, design, and implement the infrastructure, which includes one of the first IP-based contact centers in Europe.

“The infrastructure from HP and Cisco enables us to provide a best-in-class customer experience,” says Matthew Lang, vice president, CRM, for Sony Europe, headquartered in Berlin. “At Sony, it’s all about customer intimacy. Now, we can have a complete view of how and when the customer has contacted us and give our customers an excellent experience through whatever channel they prefer—Web, e-mail, phone, or letter. At the same time, the solution drives down our costs.”

“The contact-center infrastructure from HP and Cisco enables us to provide a best-in-class customer experience and drive down our costs. Working with a company of HP’s renown and reach gives us experience and knowledge, not just products. The strong alliance between HP and Cisco enables us to move into the vanguard of contact management.”

**—Matthew Lang
Vice President, CRM
Sony Europe**

“In the vanguard of contact management”

Bringing the Sony strategy of multimedia integration to service, Sony Europe’s virtual contact center gives customers easy access to support for all Sony consumer electronics products. While enhancing customer service, the infrastructure helps the company to standardize and consolidate its existing contact centers, integrating people, processes, and technologies. The environment also builds in a CRM repository of customer data that will help Sony Europe to proactively expand customer relationships and cross-sell related products.

“HP’s renown and reach give us confidence,” says Mr. Lang. “Our HP team brings us experience and knowledge, not just products. The strong alliance between HP and Cisco, a leader in IP contact center and voice-over-IP [VoIP] technologies, helps us to take full advantage of their technologies and moves us into the vanguard of contact management.”

Currently supporting about 100 contact-center agents, the scalable IP infrastructure provides a total of 700 IP telephony seats—the first phase of Sony Europe’s transition to a converged data-and-voice environment.

Collaborating to craft customer-centric support

Sony Europe developed its pioneering infrastructure with HP and Cisco, global leaders in convergent information and communication technologies, including CRM solutions.

Under the HP and Cisco Strategic Alliance, HP and Cisco combine their complementary strengths to jointly develop technologies and provide end-to-end solutions. These resources include Cisco’s industry-leading IP-based products and HP expertise in design, implementation, and management of enterprise infrastructures.

As Cisco’s leading partner for IP contact center and IP telephony environments, HP collaborated with Sony Europe to design and develop the IPCC and the converged voice-and-data network.

A team of HP Services consultants joined with Sony Europe IT and contact-center personnel to review network and contact-center requirements. The HP consultants then developed detailed architectures for the converged network and fully integrated IPCC. Together with the

Sony Europe team, they fine-tuned functional specifications to design the highly consumer-oriented environment. They then created the infrastructure by deploying Cisco’s converged network, security, and IPCC products and IP phones, integrating Sony Europe’s Clarify CRM software and its databases of customers and products with the Cisco IPCC software.



Next, the HP consultants worked with Sony to enhance its WAN. Cisco Multiprotocol Label Switching (MPLS) networking software will soon link the contact centers over the Sony Europe WAN to create a single, virtual contact center.

“Our HP team organized workshops to listen to us and understand our customers’ needs and expectations,” says Kris De Pauw, senior manager, contact-center operations to Sony Europe. “And, together with our team, they built the environment. Their know-how and flexibility were impeccable.”

“Our IPCC allows us to interact with customers as one company and adapt to their evolving needs and expectations,” continues Mr. De Pauw. “HP can keep us one step ahead of the customer.”

One call center reaches right agent, right location

The core of the virtual, pan-European contact center is the common platform running Sony contact centers in Heerlen, the Netherlands, and Brussels, Belgium. The configuration comprises Cisco IPCC, local area networking, and IP telephony products running on HP ProLiant servers.

Cisco Intelligent Contact Management software routes customer queries to agents based on their availability, product knowledge, and language skills rather than their location. Such flexibility enables Sony Europe to make

more productive use of agents and dynamically adapt resources to changing traffic flows as well as evolving business needs and product lines. The virtual infrastructure also allows Sony to efficiently extend local language support to selected markets across Europe.

“Our HP solution brings together a lot of sites throughout Europe, each with different technologies, vendors, and approaches to contact-center services,” says Ludovic Lamouroux, manager, process and information systems for Sony Europe. “Now, we can bring all of our agents, processes, and infrastructure into one virtual environment that better serves the customer, and at lower cost. HP didn’t just bring us boxes and engineers: They came with their experience and best practices and their drive to help us to achieve the best CRM, and they provided us with a turnkey implementation.”

Simpler, smarter, and faster call-handling

Simplifying and streamlining customer access to expertise, the infrastructure builds in computer telephony integration (CTI) features such as interactive voice response (IVR) functionality and media blending. For example, the Cisco IPCC software provides a universal queue for voice, e-mail, Web, and fax messages that offers customers a choice of channels and enables Sony to integrate reporting and management information.

The contact center reduces queues and eliminates the need for customers to repeat their details if they transfer from one agent to another. A consumer trying to find out how a video camera and DVD player work together no longer needs to dial several numbers and explain the query to a succession of agents. As they provide advice or suggest related products, agents can view contact information on screen pops and consult and update the customer’s profile in the CRM repository. While the caller remains on the line, the agent can pass updated screen pops to other agents in real time.

The IPCC environment also provides management tools and reports that improve control and support continuous improvement: Managers can view workloads in real time and track activity by product or question to gauge consumer interests and needs.

While enhancing Sony Europe’s interactions with consumers, smarter and faster call handling lowers the company’s costs. The converged environment also streamlines support: IT personnel maintain and adapt one platform that integrates telephony as well as contact centers, rather than managing multiple infrastructures.

For example, with the converged network, moving employees to new locations takes far less time. IT personnel simply plug the IP phones into the network without having to change either the extension names or the directory list.

The power of relationships

Sony Europe regards its relationship with HP and Cisco as a competitive asset.

“HP and Cisco understand our needs and share our vision,” says Laurent Pellet, director, planning and control for Sony Europe. “Our core business is consumer electronics; yet we also have ambitious goals to distinguish our company with superior CRM and customer service. HP and Cisco provide us with real solutions that enable us to enhance and expand our customer relationships.”

Challenges

- Competitors and imitators commoditize market, eroding brand loyalty
- Supporting multiple products across multiple countries is costly and complex
- Access to service is complicated and time-consuming for consumers
- Customer information is not retained to guide CRM initiatives

Solutions

HP Services

Prime contracting, systems integration, and consulting services to plan, design, develop, and integrate Internet Protocol Contact Center (IPCC) and converged voice/data network based on Cisco products

Hardware

- Cisco Catalyst switches, Cisco routers, Cisco PIX firewalls, and 700 Cisco IP phones
- IPCC platform comprising HP ProLiant ML370, ML530, and ML570 servers and ProLiant 6500 blade servers

Software

- Cisco IPCC, Cisco Interactive Voice Response (IVR), Cisco Intelligent Contact Management, Cisco Unity voice mail, and Cisco Agent Desktop software; Cisco Intrusion Detection System (IDS); and CiscoWorks network management software
- Clarify CRM software

Results/Benefits

- Consumers gain seamless access to appropriate support
- Consolidation of customer care increases productivity of agents, whose expertise is available based on customer need rather than agent location
- CRM and IPCC integration supports loyalty programs and cross-/up-selling of related products
- Consolidation of contact-center, telephony, and IT support with 700-seat IP telephony platform lowers cost of ownership and increases adaptability

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