AMERICAN BRIDGE MAKES THE LEAP TO SKYPE

Important Projects, Important Partnerships

American Bridge has been the force behind design, construction, and maintenance of some of the world's most recognizable structures, including:

SF/Oakland Bay Bridge

Las Vegas "High Roller"

Mackinac Bridge

Queensferry Crossing

Despite its pedigree, the firm rarely works alone. Joint ventures and partnerships are critical to success. The firm actively interacts with local governments, transportation agencies, subcontractors, and architects. "Our estimating and engineering departments are very active in our offices and with contractors and suppliers," said IT Director Jay Copenhaver. "Some of those partners were using Skype for Business. **Next thing we knew, more and more people were conferencing, and the dots just started to connect.**"

The partnership with Enabling Technologies provided American Bridge with a predictable outcome to its own important Unified Communications project. "Enabling was instrumental in making this project a huge success," said Copenhaver.

MICROSOFT UNIFIES CONFERENCING AND CALLING EXPERIENCE

When your business is building the world's most iconic bridges and structures, building a new communications platform is serious business. So as IT Director Jay Copenhaver set about replacing the firm's disparate communication tools, he took a serious look at the alternatives before his team decided on Microsoft Skype for Business.

American Bridge had been using a variety of systems for conference calling, screen sharing, and video conferencing, and the management team saw advantages in streamlining. "We had too many different ways of communicating in the various conferencing rooms," said Copenhaver. "Our CEO wanted to see standardized conference phones and video systems in each room." But the biggest pain point was telephony. "Our existing phone system was over 15 years old," Copenhaver explained. "The provider was out of business and we could no longer obtain service or parts replacements. We wanted to replace it with a collaborative VoIP solution." **With Skype for Business, the firm solved both problems at once.**

Migration Expedited by Issues with Legacy PBX

Making the move was expedited due to a system-affecting issue with the old telephone system that peaked in November. Senior Management gave IT a target to replace the system by the end of March.

"We considered Cisco, Ring Central, Comcast, and Windstream," said Copenhaver. "We already owned a Microsoft Enterprise license that included Skype for Business, and we were actively using Skype for Business with our Help Desk. **Users were really embracing the IM and screen sharing features.**" Once the concept was developed, the firm did its research. **"We spoke with several companies that were using Skype for Business as their VoIP solution. All were highly pleased with their decision,"** said Copenhaver.

Enabling Technologies was engaged to assist in the project from the onset. **"We were able to meet our requirements with Enabling's help,"** said Copenhaver, who had budgeted the project, but simply needed to move more quickly. Enabling was contracted to deliver planning, design, implementation, support, and organizational change management services. Early in the process, the reference architecture was developed. "We originally thought we'd be able to go to the cloud, but Enabling helped us understand the benefits of an on-premises system," said Copenhaver. **"We have a hybrid, and will be able to rollout cloud PBX to remote offices."**

"Enabling had the expertise to solve several challenges, including some that we were having with our SIP provider." Enabling's work was made extraordinarily easier by the proactive work of the American Bridge network team, Eric Lansbery, IT Manager of Networks & Operations, DJ Mattucci, Network Administrator, and Matt Guerrera, Office365 Administrator. They not only quickly completed Enabling's prerequisite checklists, they provided the "boots on the ground" for most of the installation, configuration and end-user interaction which allowed for a very smooth project. "My staff is very knowledgeable, hard-working and dedicated to American Bridge," said Copenhaver.

ROI and Productivity Gains

The hard and soft gains from the project are impressive. **"We had estimated an ROI of 30 months considering the time, effort and expenses of maintaining our previous phone system,"** said Copenhaver. In addition to hard costs from saving on moving PRIs to SIP and using new devices which function better and have less service calls, soft benefits have been realized. "Productivity has certainly increased with the ease of scheduling audio/video conference calls from within Outlook," said Copenhaver. **"Ad-hoc conference calls are effortless, so employees are communicating with each other more readily."**

Lessons Learned

"Having to move from E3 to E5 licenses wasn't something we totally expected, but Matt Guerrera provided the knowledge to make the right choices," said Copenhaver, who advises to learn all about the Microsoft licensing schemes. But the biggest lesson learned is to do more research on the SIP provider. A reference American Bridge spoke to highly recommended their vendor, but call reliability was initially not good. "Other than that, the project went extremely well," said Copenhaver.

Ensuring End-User Adoption

American Bridge used Enabling's change management program to maximize their investment. The program ensured users were excited about and properly trained on new tools.

"We enlisted Enabling's services to provide a comprehensive preparation program for our user base," stated Copenhaver. "This included marketing announcements about the various stages of the project and holding a 'Device Bar' to allow users to choose a communication method that matched their working habits." The device bar was set up like a real bar, decorated to look like a pub, with non-alcoholic beverages and snacks served!

AB also fun with its pilot groups. "We awarded our most active user with a wall-mountable award, and Chief Engineer Nick Greco was pleased to receive our "Premier Skype User" award," said Lansbery.

> **"We made it clear that Skype for Business was more than a phone system."**
>
> **Jay Copenhaver,**
> **Corporate IT Director**

"We facilitated several training sessions," said Copenhaver, during which busy users were taught just the basics. "It's so easy to make a few mouse clicks and they're off and running," said Copenhaver. **"The integrated calendar and screen pops on Polycom phones are very beneficial."** AB offers repeating training courses for those who couldn't come and to refresh those who originally made it.

American Bridge can see the results. **"User reaction was and continues to be very positive,"** said Copenhaver. "Our mobile users really like the ability to switch from their workspace device to their Bluetooth device without call interruption," Copenhaver said. **"This is huge for them when having to leave for the airport while still on an important call."**

"Find a platinum partner to assist. It truly made all the difference!"

Since Copenhaver was familiar with Skype from prior work experience, his main concern was "Bringing the project in on time and under budget. Both objectives were met by weekly (sometimes daily) calls with Enabling to keep track of expenditures." In addition, said Copenhaver, "We can provide better support for our users. Having contracted 3rd party support with Enabling has been very beneficial. They were instrumental in helping solve some connectivity issues with the SIP trunk provider."

> **"I would absolutely, without hesitation, recommend using Enabling Technologies."**
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> **Jay Copenhaver, Corporate IT Director**

To point your UC&C or Office 365 project on the bridge to success like American Bridge, contact info@enablingtechcorp.com or learn more at www.enablingtechcorp.com