RSM ENHANCES TELECOMMUNICATIONS PLATFORM FOR LARGE AUTO DEALER GROUP

Overview

Carousel Motor Group is an automotive dealer group headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The company was founded in 2008 as a subsidiary of The Pohlad Companies, and currently consists of seven individual dealerships with nearly 500 employees. Carousel Motor Group has experienced sustained success due to its focus on efficiency, as well as its key pillars of community, service and integrity.

Background

Carousel Motor Group experienced four critical concerns related to its voice platform and network infrastructure: a telephone system that did not align with company needs, ineffective network design and implementation, an unreliable hosting environment, and significant ongoing costs to support its network design and architecture.

The company was dissatisfied with its voice platform and especially frustrated with managing telephone calls. Specifically, Carousel Motor Group’s telephone systems had poor audio quality and frequent dropped calls, with employees experiencing difficulty answering and routing calls. The company prides itself on customer service, and its phone challenges were affecting the business.

“We were working with a system that was not well thought out when it came to its design,” said Rachel Lockett, chief information officer for The Pohlad Companies. “It was not a voice platform that was designed to handle the complexity of our call flow.”

Carousel Motor Group also had multiple separate communications solutions between dealerships. It sought to create a consistent unified voice platform with the ability to seamlessly transfer calls to its call center and move calls throughout the system with ease and confidence.

The company’s hosting environment was also not stable and was not a good fit for the business. Furthermore, the
system ran on a wide area network (WAN) with an out-of-date architecture. In the evolving dealership communications environment, the business demanded more internet bandwidth, and increasing the capacity was very expensive.

Project

Previously, RSM advisors performed an assessment of the voice platform for The Pohlad Companies, Carousel Motor Group's parent company. Following that successful engagement, RSM was chosen to perform a similar assessment and system selection, and potentially an implementation for the dealer group.

“We have a lot of trust in RSM because of the relationship that has been established, and the quality of the previous process and recommendations,” commented Lockett.

Enhancing telecommunications capabilities

RSM began the telecommunications assessment project by meeting with key Carousel Motor Group stakeholders to understand the technical and business requirements for its voice platform. The RSM team reviewed documentation and guidelines for the company’s phone systems and networks to gather information about contract carriers and internet services. This analysis determined where Carousel Motor Group was paying too much money and also where it did not receive the services or efficiency it paid for.

In addition, RSM met with each business unit to understand what employees liked about the existing voice environment and which features could further benefit the organization. The RSM team also provided scenarios and suggestions based on its industry experience with similar clients. Based on those discussions, RSM met with Carousel Motor Group management and created a matrix of key requirements, prioritizing and assigning a business value to each.

With this information, RSM evaluated several potential voice solutions—hosted, on-premises and hybrid platforms. After considering the company’s requirements and both the short- and long-term total cost of ownership, RSM suggested a Mitel unified voice platform for Carousel Motor Group. The company agreed and chose RSM to implement the solution.

“We knew that RSM would have an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each platform to match them up with our business,” said Lockett. “RSM brought objectivity, because they were not married to one product. They came in and understood our business without past history and preconceived notions and made the best recommendation for our company. That credibility was by far the greatest value they brought to the assessment.”

Furthermore, RSM’s carrier services team helped Carousel Motor Group pay for its new voice platform by finding savings in other areas. Working with carriers can be challenging, so the carrier services group took that responsibility for Carousel Motor Group and aggregated data about which services were available, including data connections and wireless connectivity. The team provided clarity about month-over-month costs for all options, scheduled implementation and managed commitments for the selected carrier.

“I have had challenges putting one circuit into one building,” said Mark Spanagel, IT director for Carousel Motor Group. “RSM was putting two circuits into 11 buildings and working with as many as five carriers because of the geography. I would encourage anyone undertaking a project of this scale to work with the RSM carrier management team. It drives immense value.”

During and following the Mitel system implementation, RSM developed comprehensive documentation to help Carousel Motor Group understand the new framework and how calls flowed and could be routed.

“RSM met with every store to design a huge flow chart of how calls would route through each location, then drew it and gave it to us” said Spanagel. “Often, you work with someone to design a solution, but the process of maintaining and updating it is done by memory because nobody ever details the framework and updates it live. RSM’s deliverables during and after the implementation were immensely valuable. It sounds like a small thing, but it’s not.”

While the implementation was a success, it did not happen without challenges. Some miscommunication occurred during the final steps of the implementation at one location, and the phone system’s connection did not match the connection to the outside public telephone network. However, the RSM team collaborated with Carousel Motor Group and vendors to develop an effective and efficient solution.

“We thought we were going to be back at square one and blowing the timeline by months,” said Lockett. “But we got everyone in a room with RSM leading, and eventually we came to one plan that got us back on track and saved the timeline entirely. To me, that was one of the proudest moments during the project. That was real problem solving and grace under pressure.”

Implementing effective infrastructure and network design

In addition to the various infrastructure challenges Carousel Motors Group faced, the company did not have an appropriate network design to support a modern phone system. The organization also had some concerns about the overall framework’s disaster recovery and business continuity capabilities. Therefore, the organization chose RSM to assess its network design and implement a new solution to provide the performance and reliability to deliver exceptional and consistent customer service.

The RSM team conducted an infrastructure assessment that aligned with the assessment process for unified communications and telephony. RSM evaluated the company’s infrastructure and concerns about scalability and how well technology would adapt as the business changes. All key network areas were considered during the assessment, including network design, firewalls and edge security, with RSM advisors making suggestions about how to improve the environment.
“The infrastructure proposal was incredibly detailed and thought-out,” said Lockett. “It was new technology, new capabilities and very different from what everyone else was proposing. But the way it was communicated allayed all of our fears.”

Spanagel continued, “While a lot of it looked like what we needed and what we asked for, it did not look like something that could possibly be less expensive. But it was. We had confidence in the RSM team because they did not say ‘this is theoretically how it is going to work;’ they said ‘this is what we do at many other places and this is how it works.’”

Some tasks on the network are more important than others. For Carousel Motor Group, voice traffic is very important, and RSM proposed and implemented a Cisco Intelligent Wide Area Network (iWAN) solution to provide the best customer experience.

The iWAN platform optimized Carousel Motor Group’s bandwidth, provided more effective routing and created a more efficient and resilient technology environment. The company has two separate internet connections and the iWAN system can balance traffic between them, prioritizing voice traffic to increase reliability. The solution provides current performance statistics, so it knows current speeds and delays, and can route traffic to the connection with the best throughput and latency.

From a disaster recovery and business continuity perspective, RSM implemented dual Cisco routers to provide Carousel Motors Group with more redundancy and configurability. The structure establishes several points of failure, as both routers and multiple internet connections would have to go offline for the system to become unavailable. In addition, in a disaster scenario, this framework enables Carousel Motor to dedicate a larger percentage of bandwidth to voice communications to help ensure that phones stay up.

Developing a new managed IT services solution

Following the telecommunications and infrastructure implementations, Carousel Motor Group turned to RSM to help manage its new framework and augment current technology staff. The company has an existing team of technical resources, so RSM developed a hybrid managed IT approach that pairs internal knowledge with the RSM team’s ability to manage complex system issues and maintain reliability, availability and adaptability.

“We use RSM as an escalation point on our infrastructure and phone system when our internal team gets beyond its depth,” said Spanagel. “We are extremely happy with the ongoing process of getting help when we need additional resources.”

For example, internal Carousel Motor Group employees can manage issues such as adding users and changing permissions, while RSM addresses larger concerns including changes in routing and correcting any call quality issues. Most importantly, the company has one point of contact at RSM, so problems are handled efficiently, with more visibility into issue resolution.

Outcomes

RSM’s telecommunications and network infrastructure implementations have helped Carousel Motor Group’s technology meet the challenges of the constantly evolving business. The RSM team understood the company’s business needs, and selected technology solutions to fit the current and future needs of the organization. Because the solutions were adaptable and forward-thinking, RSM and Carousel Motor Group continue to work together to adjust the framework without significant reengineering to help the company provide industry-leading customer service.

“When you spend the long hours with a vendor on a project like the time we spent with RSM, their employees start to get very honest,” said Spanagel. “And that’s usually when you can tell what it’s like to work for that company; I have seen it a lot. And with RSM, it’s a much different moment than with people that work with other companies. It’s a testament to the quality of people that RSM has.”

Key benefits of RSM’s relationship with Carousel Motor Group include:

- A more powerful telecommunications environment with enhanced call quality and reliability
- Comprehensive Mitel voice platform performance analytics, demonstrating areas of improvement and enabling efficient issue resolution
- A scalable and adaptable network infrastructure with more effective disaster recovery capabilities
- A thorough managed IT services solution, helping to optimize the company’s technology investments