A BT Hosted Voice Embark VPN provides a gateway to convergence

Harveys Furnishing chooses BT for its voice network and cuts its costs by nearly one third

**Executive summary**

Harveys Furnishing is the flagship brand of the Homestyle Group – one of the UK’s largest furniture retailing organisations. Recent years had seen a diversity of communication systems adopted throughout the Group and, with Harveys in the lead, it was keen to investigate converged network technology.

Consideration was given to full integration of the Group’s voice and data traffic onto a single network, but this was deferred until it could be cost justified. An interim solution was sought that would retain the BT Hosted Voice Embark service. With the aid of consultants, alternative quotations using carrier pre-select were researched. BT was also asked to respond and, surprisingly for Harveys, came in with the lowest bid.

By negotiating a new contract covering total call spend and line rental for the entire Homestyle Group, Harveys has retained its existing services at a cost estimated to be 30 per cent below its previous arrangements. By running a BT Hosted Voice Embark voice VPN, Harveys has a roadmap to convergence.

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Systems Manager for Networking and Communications
Harveys Furnishing
Case study
Harveys Furnishing

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Marketplace
Part of the Homestyle Group – one of the UK’s largest furniture retailing organisations with nearly 180 stores and an annual turnover approaching £300 million – Harveys Furnishing is the flagship brand. Competing in a heavily contested marketplace, the Group is under constant pressure to contain costs and improve efficiency. That includes keeping its telecommunications systems under constant review. Homestyle had been benefiting from discounted call rates under a BT contract.

Business opportunity
Harveys Furnishing was a long-term user of BT Hosted Voice Embark – one of a family of BT virtual private network (VPN) services – linking its many stores into a voice network without the need for private branch exchanges (PBXs). The company was pleased with the service but Homestyle Group’s BT contract was coming to an end. Harveys took this as an opportunity to review the market for voice and data networks, and extended this review to include the entire Group.

Bob Davis, Systems Manager for Networking and Communications at Harveys Furnishing, says: “We started by looking for a voice over internet protocol (VoIP) solution. Our existing separate data wide area network was based upon BT’s IPStream service, and we wanted a migration path to a converged data network over which we could run IP Telephony.”

When estimates came in it was clear that at current pricing levels – including upgraded data circuits, routers, IP telephones, and other associated IP hardware – the business case would not hold water. A compromise was sought – with VoIP in sight as the eventual aim — that would make best use of available resources and technology.

With the help of external consultants, the viability of a group-wide solution — employing carrier pre-select in conjunction with the BT Hosted Voice Embark service and using existing analogue telephone lines — was investigated. A shortlist of potential suppliers was identified and a round of quotations began. When Harveys had received the final submissions, BT as the incumbent provider was also invited to tender.

BT solution
With BT Hosted Voice Embark, the telephone extensions in Harveys Furnishing stores are linked directly to the local BT exchange using BT Featureline. The solution uses Centrex Access Lines to replicate PBX functionality not only between those extensions but also with other stores across the UK.

By running a BT Hosted Voice Embark voice VPN, Harveys is at the gateway to convergence. The unique ability of the BT solution to interconnect a disparate estate – including small Centrex-linked sites, larger PBX-equipped offices, retail connections, home workers and mobile workers — enables Harveys not only to create a homogenous corporate network but also to adopt transformational and collaborative working methods.

Why BT?
- Harveys opted for the BT solution because it was the most competitively priced and offered a roadmap to full convergence
- BT was completely flexible – it was prepared to quote on terms to suit Harveys’ situation
- Harveys chose to stay with BT because it offers stability: BT is in the market for the long term
This is all achieved in a flexible and scalable environment where the company can dispense with capital investment in its network and hand the management task over to BT.

The BT Hosted Voice Embark pricing structure also offers substantial savings on BT base call prices, available right across the organisation regardless of the call volumes of individual sites. Calls made between extensions within a site are naturally free.

Results

Operating under the new BT agreement, Harveys and the entire Homestyle Group are seeing immediate cost benefits. By consolidating the entire Group’s telephone traffic under a single pricing plan and migrating to new contract for Hosted Voice Embark, Harveys estimates it will save well over 30 per cent in the first year.

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When BT’s proposal was submitted, Harveys was impressed to find that it was very keenly structured. BT Hosted Voice Embark service had allowed BT to be more flexible with its charging policy. The BT package compared favourably with Harvey’s existing costs, even taking into account the previous discounts. When based upon projected call volumes across the Homestyle Group as a whole, PSTN call rates and line rentals delivered a much lower tariff and included free 24 x 7 fault response.

The length of contract was also a deciding factor in choosing BT. Harveys wanted to retain the flexibility to revisit its communications policy when advances in technology or lower prices made it attractive to do so. BT was able to revise its terms to accommodate a one-year renewable contract for the PSTN line rentals and calls, and an 18-month term for the BT Hosted Voice Embark service. Staying with BT would also mean that Harveys would retain the reassurance of an established relationship and continuity of service from a stable market leader.

Technology blueprint

BT Hosted Voice Embark is a service that interconnects with the PSTN. Beyond the simple voice VPN functionality described here, it incorporates IP gateways that enable interconnection with existing IP VPNs and other private network domains. BT Hosted Voice Embark is also ADSL compatible, and provides access to BT services such as Hosted Voice over IP (VoIP) and Multimedia Voice over IP (MMVoIP) – allowing customers to trial VoIP without risk, and migrate services to a fully converged environment as and when they are ready.

No additional equipment is required, because the intelligence that drives the service resides in the BT network – not on the customer’s premises. Existing analogue phones may be used unchanged, and even mobiles can be incorporated into the VPN. The BT Hosted Voice Embark service is compatible with most PBX systems, so any that already exist can usually be incorporated into the network, together with their existing extension numbering system.

Enhanced maintenance packages and disaster recovery options are also available as part of the BT Hosted Voice Embark service. Many advanced features are optionally available, including amongst others voicemail, automatic unanswered call redirect, calling line identity display (CLI), Ring Back When Free, and Ring Back When Next Used.

Detailed monthly management reporting helps the user to monitor and control call traffic and call handling performance. The BT Hosted Voice Embark service is fully managed by BT, with all sites covered by a maintenance package tailored to the customer’s specific requirements.

Main BT products and services

* BT Hosted Voice Embark
* BT Business Plan Calls Package

Offices worldwide

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