Incorporated in 1996, Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India Limited (MHRIL) is a part of the leisure and hospitality arm of the Mahindra Group. The company's flagship brand, Club Mahindra Holidays has a customer base of over 143,000 members and 42 resorts spread across India and abroad. It also has a network of 19 offices across the country.

The company employs around 140,000 people in 100 countries and aims to be amongst the top five companies in the travel and hospitality segment, in terms of its member base, by 2016. Its services also include Club Mahindra Travels, its online arm; Mahindra Homestays, a service which offers private accommodation for home stays; and Zest, a short holiday product.

As the travel and hospitality segment grew more competitive and customer demands increased, MHRIL took rapid steps to overhaul its dated communications infrastructure. The aim was to leverage telecom as a strategic tool to keep pace with market developments and retain its leadership position in this space.

tele.net traces the development of the company's communications set-up…

Legacy system

Initially, MHRIL had a very basic communications set-up. According to Mahesh Manchi, chief information officer, the company's legacy system was a multi-tiered one, with each component catering to a different requirement. The system comprised a decentralised property management system (PMS), old EPABX systems and landlines. The company also used manual forms to maintain records.

However, it soon realised the importance of adopting modern technologies and platforms in order to make its services and products more effective.

System overhaul

MHRIL revamped its telecom set-up in multiple stages. According to Manchi, the company began the overhauling process in July 2011. At this time, it phased out its old EPABX system. "This procedure entailed introducing a host of new equipment and platforms such as a call centre solution, which entailed auto diallers, an integrated report generating tool and interactive voice response system, and easy-to-use landline connections that could be integrated with the customer relationship management (CRM) platform," explains Manchi.

In December 2011, the company undertook further initiatives to modernise its telecom system. These included automating the customer lead generation platform using Android-based tablets. "This worked to our advantage as it reduced manual errors and intervention and increased productivity by automatically integrating with the CRM tool and diallers," Manchi says.

In March 2012, MHRIL shifted to a centralised PMS platform. According to Manchi, this helped generate and gather integrated reports, thus making the process of maintaining records easier. "The focus was on ensuring high availability and leveraging an enterprise cloud environment to the fullest."

At present, the travel major has an internet connection and MPLS port connectivity of 40 Mbps each, with up to 2 Mbps speed for remote locations. Over 2,000 employees can currently access this network. Apart from this, the travel major undertook several other initiatives. It added redundancy to its system's core switches and routers by adopting auto failover mechanisms and streamlined interbranch connectivity. This was achieved via the MPLS medium, with redundancy provided by multiple providers. In addition, all offices were integrated using Centrix EPABX systems, and communication between offices was improved via the deployment of chat and videoconferencing solutions.

The company evaluated and implemented cutting-edge call centre management products for both outbound and inbound facilities. Further, it employed a host of mobility solutions such as Black-Berry smartphones, iPads and active sync facilities for handsets. For securing its network, the company deployed Websense's security solutions along with Cisco's ASA series of adaptive security appliances (for firewalls) and the Symantec Endpoint Protection antivirus system. Moreover, it utilised Siebel's CRM platform, SAP's enterprise resource planning system and Juniper's core switches and routers for redundancy, and Websense's solutions for controlling web traffic.

In terms of service providers and vendors, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited and Tata Communications served as the primary operators, with Reliance Communications providing backup.

Challenges and benefits

Working with multiple vendors, aggressive timelines and vendors failing to keep their commitments were some of the major issues faced by the company, according to Manchi. "Identifying the appropriate service providers and enabling connectivity for non-accessible remote locations also posed challenges in deployment."

Nevertheless, the benefits derived by the company due to the overhaul far outweighed the challenges. Its new communications set-up has helped increase productivity, and encouraged better collaboration and communication, besides providing the top management 360-degree visibility for all business processes.

Overall, the step-by-step overhaul process undertaken by the company for its telecom set-up has helped it stay ahead of the competition and provide better services to its customers.

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