



Flower Shop Network Realizes Seamless Integration and Room to Grow With Alternate Access® VoIP Solution



Issues

- ◆ Phone system could not support continuing company growth
- ◆ Addition of new divisions made it difficult for receptionist to properly greet callers, as well as route calls to the appropriate division

Solutions

- ◆ Flexible phone system that allows changes or addition of lines in-house
- ◆ Phone system with 'open architecture' to interface with company database
- ◆ Addition of desktop component to allow employees to see a customer's name before greeting them

Results

- ◆ System administrator can easily make changes or additions to the system in-house and with minimal downtime
- ◆ More efficient call management
- ◆ Enhanced customer service experience with personalized greetings and faster service
- ◆ Realizing the value of additional features that have improved employee training

created the Flower Shop Network concept in 1999, along with her business partner and husband, Brock. The idea stemmed from the evolving wire service industry and the growing impact of the Internet on the floral industry. As Internet-savvy consumers turned to the computer to locate florists, the need for online floral directories increased.

"More and more we saw consumers turning to the Internet to locate a florist in the town where the delivery would be made," said Atwill. "Consumers were no longer visiting their local florist to place an order to be wired elsewhere. That shift opened the door for what we do."



For florists, wire services had been a necessary evil. On one hand, they helped create more opportunities for business; but at the same time they exacted a significant toll on florists' profit margins when they were used. Flower Shop Network, on the other hand, ensured that 100 percent of their profit margins would remain with the florist.



It pays to look out for the little guy. That belief is paramount at Paragould, Ark.-based Flower Shop Network, Inc., an advertising and web technology company that offers small businesses an opportunity to advertise online and gain much-needed Internet exposure.

Loranne Atwill, vice president of operations,

Outgrowing a phone system

Over the years business increased for Flower Shop Network, and the company began to offer its services to different types of retailers – while maintaining the floral industry as its primary focus. As additional industries came into the picture, Flower Shop Network created new divisions and hired employees to staff them.

The company quickly outgrew its traditional phone system.

As the company expanded, the receptionist was more and more challenged to handle calls professionally. With the new divisional structure, she had no way to determine which division the incoming calls were for and, therefore, was unable to customize her greeting based on the calling party.



Atwill explained, "It was getting very confusing as we added divisions. We had already maxed out our phone system, and our receptionist was becoming frustrated in attempting to route calls properly. We would have to upgrade our system in order to further develop the business."

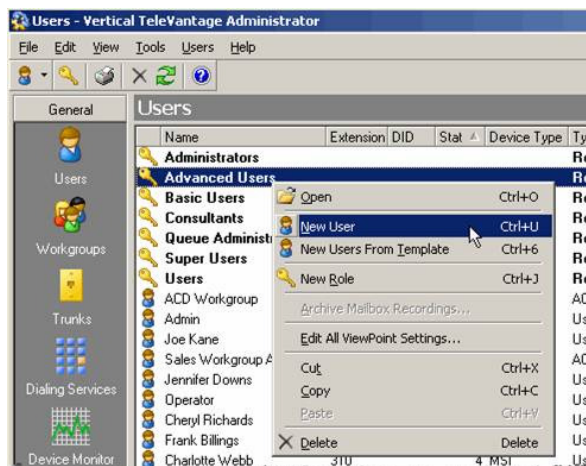
Finding Alternate Access® and TeleVantage®

The Atwills began to investigate new phone system solutions. As proponents of outside-of-the-box thinking, they started their search by outlining what their ideal phone system would be if they had no limitations.

"We started with the sky being the limit," Atwill said. "We explored what we would want if we could just go out and write a check for the crème de la crème of what was out there."

Flower Shop Network met with several providers, but none met their outside-of-the-box expectations. Most of the providers merely recommended bigger traditional systems. While the Atwills considered that option, they did not believe a traditional system was capable of doing what they envisioned. That is when they met the Alternate Access® team at a floral tradeshow.

Alternate Access introduced Flower Shop Network to the Voice over IP phone system, TeleVantage®. The feature-rich system offered the innovative solutions they desired and came in at a lower price point than any other provider had proposed.



Growing the System with the Business

Flower Shop Network was wowed by the flexibility this solution would offer as the company continued to grow. Additional lines could be added easily, and changes or additions to the system could be completed in-house with minimal downtime.

"We are already working with the Alternate Access team to implement some additions," said Atwill. "We are always looking for ways to improve or better utilize the technology we have, and I think it will be an ongoing process."

Complete Integration with Customer Contact Database

Working with Alternate Access, Flower Shop Network integrated TeleVantage with their home-grown customer contact database, QuickLinks. By doing so, the company was able to program the system to automatically route incoming calls to specific divisions based on phone number. The receptionist no longer needed to route calls manually, increasing her productivity and freeing up her time to complete other tasks.

The addition of the ViewPoint™ desktop component allowed for more efficient call management on the front-end. When a customer calls, a pop-up screen on the desktop computer alerts the sales person with the customer's name and account information.



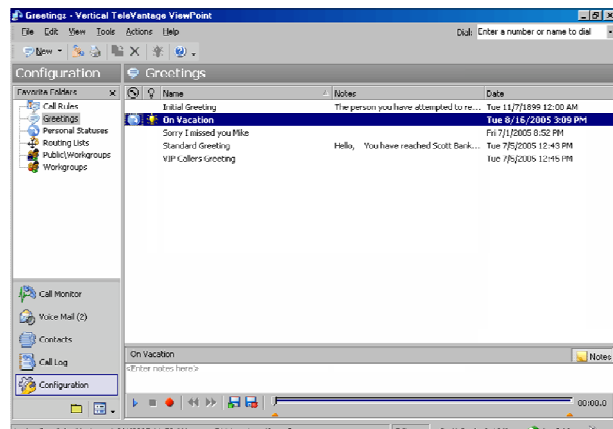
Leslie Cox joined Flower Shop Network as a network coordinator after the TeleVantage system was installed, and she was quickly impressed by how sophisticated, yet user-friendly, the phone system was. Cox explained, "I am in a sales position, so contacting existing customers and prospects is my livelihood. I literally contact customers all day, making 125 to 200 calls daily."

Cox has been most impressed with the phone system's integration with QuickLinks, which helped increase her productivity by eliminating time spent searching for a customer's account information. Instead, upon dialing the customer's number, the corresponding account information is automatically accessible via the phone system's ViewPoint pop-up screen.

Ninety percent of Cox's customers are already stored in the database, and an additional five to 10 percent are prospects that she must add. "Adding new prospects to the database is simple," said Cox. "When I make a follow up call, I hit two buttons, and the pop-up screen displays my notes from my last call. It's very easy and efficient when you are on the phone with a customer."

This integration means that customer information is at her fingertips, and she can easily quote how many hits a customer's advertisement has received, the equivalent dollar amount and how many orders they have received – all while on the call with the customer.

TeleVantage also permitted Flower Shop Network to create unique greetings for each division, so each customer receives a personalized customer service experience with direct assistance. Atwill added, "The system has improved the way we answer the phone and enhanced our image. Calls are answered more quickly and each customer's needs are met more efficiently – and customers notice that."



The Atwills were pleasantly surprised with features they were initially unfamiliar with, such as the Call Recording feature, which has become a beneficial training tool. For instance, the sales managers have created a "greatest hits album," or compilation of successful sales calls, for each sales employee. Reviewing these calls helps the sales staff recognize strengths and weaknesses, as well as freshen and improve sales pitches.

Recording Calls to Train Sales Staff

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Cox is a huge fan of the Call Recording feature. "When you are having an 'off week,' or when you are off of your game, you can go back, listen, and evaluate yourself. You can

She also uses the feature as a back-up to note-taking. If she forgets a detail a customer has shared, Cox can go back and capture it from the recording. Conversely, if she has dealt with a customer and has an issue, she can pinpoint exactly where the error occurred and correct it.



Atwill explained, “We have found when an employee first comes in – especially when they show great promise – we record them. Then, about a month in, they get the ‘know too much syndrome’ and their sales actually start to decrease because as they learn more, they try to cram too much into their pitch.”

When this occurs, the sales managers use the call recordings to get the employee back to the basics – reminding them of those first two weeks on the phone when they kept the pitches simple and focused.

Business After TeleVantage®

Now that their staff is up to speed on their phone system and its extended capabilities, the Flower Shop Network team cannot imagine conducting business without the system. Atwill jokes, “If we tried to reinstall a traditional system in this building, I can only imagine the consequences. For one, I think we would lose our receptionist.”

All kidding aside, the Atwills are pleased with the phone system’s performance and its impact on sales productivity and customer service. These business owners will continue to exercise their out-of-the-box thinking to determine new ways to put their phone system to work and make it an even greater asset for their company.



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