



Collaborating across continents

Nowcomm's 0% APR technology upgrade wins the interest of API

Associated Paper Industries was first established in the 1950s, a time of industrial pioneering. Since then, guided by the spirit of innovation, API Group PLC has grown to become a leading manufacturer of specialised materials for packaging. Recognised worldwide for their quality and technical excellence, API's foil, holographic and laminate products are used widely in the packaging of premium-branded goods and in security applications for tamper-proof and tamper-evident packaging.

With businesses located in the UK, continental Europe, USA and Asia-Pacific, global communications and effective IT are critical to API's success. The group invests heavily in technology to make sure they can deliver high quality, innovative products as efficiently as possible.

Until relatively recently, API was struggling with their voice and data network infrastructure that had become outdated and difficult to manage and maintain. Their wide area network wasn't delivering either value or performance. Having grown piecemeal over time it was increasingly failing to keep up with and respond to the demands of the business, with the risk of impact on productivity and profits.

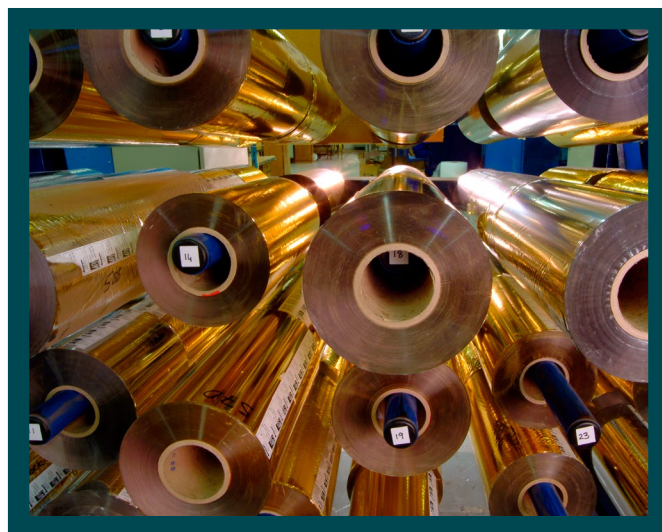
Like many businesses that had grown both organically and through acquisition, different sites were using a diverse mix of technologies both for voice and data. As well as multiple traditional PABX systems of different types, a recent independent investment in a VoIP solution had also been made in the USA.

Something had to be done so API started to talk to Nowcomm, the network skills, managed services and support company specialising in unified communications. To begin with the topic on the table was a local area network refresh for UK sites. But this initial discussion soon revealed the limitations of the network and led to a much broader review of the group's infrastructure needs.

One specific issue was the desire to integrate telephony with the US VoIP system to get the benefits of inter-site calls over the WAN. That was clearly impossible with the limitations of the existing network and its susceptibility to delays. With budget being very tight, finance was also a serious constraint. The answer, if it could be found, was to help API get more for the same spend by looking at the total value that could be achieved by a step change in technology - but without increasing the existing demands on financial budgets.

After extensive consultation, including the cost modelling of the existing network and communications systems, Nowcomm designed and put forward a proposal for a modern, high-performance international network and communications solution that would meet the needs of the business well into the foreseeable future.

A significant aspect of this proposal was Nowcomm's introduction of a zero per cent, interest-free finance offer from Cisco Capital over three years, enabling API to stay within their existing operational cost footprint.



The adopted and successful proposal involved an international MPLS-managed WAN service connecting ten sites across the UK, France, Italy and east to west coast USA.

The UK saw a LAN infrastructure upgrade across five sites, including the implementation of a centrally controlled Wi-Fi network. VoIP was deployed to over 250 users across these sites via a centrally provisioned and managed Cisco Unified Communications Manager solution.

Nowcomm recommended that API take advantage of the Cisco Unified Workspace Licensing structure to deploy several advanced communication applications to the desktop including Unified Messaging, Presence & Instant Messaging.

Making full use of the open Application Programming Interface capability in Unified Communications Manager, Nowcomm also introduced a software application by Singlewire that turns the speakers within the IP telephone speaker system into a replacement for the conventional tannoy.



“Nowcomm have become a true trusted advisor and partner,”
said Gavin McKay,
Infrastructure Manager for API.
“They are a professional and reliable point of contact for all our network and telephony requirements. We have found Nowcomm’s engineers to be both knowledgeable and effective, whether dealing with a support call or delivering new services on site.”

The increased uptake of collaborative video calls across continents was one of the big wins for API. Unlike the traditional network-based video conferencing systems they had previously used, whose complexity and relatively low quality hadn't effectively replaced the need to travel, they were now able to reduce operational cost, enhance collaboration and speed up decision-making across UK and USA operations thanks to the increased bandwidth and enhanced levels of utilisation control enabled by the network upgrade.

Nowcomm also supplemented the existing business video system with a TelePresence room-based solution and multi-party video bridge, making TelePresence video collaboration quick and simple through the push of a single button on a Desk Phone. This tight integration to the IP telephony environment has since been taken a step further by Nowcomm equipping key API personnel in the UK with video-enabled desk top phones capable of supporting video calls between each other but also joining TelePresence conferences as well.

API is now looking to extend the benefits of video collaboration much more broadly across the organisation, including mobile smartphone users, by exploiting the video capability of the any-device Jabber communications client – enabling them to get more value from their original investment, and further improving their agility and ability to respond quickly to customers and new opportunities.

The commercial advantages from the step change in technology that API were looking for have been well and truly achieved. Thanks to Nowcomm’s managed services model, visibility and proactive monitoring of the MPLS led to a reduction in link downtime and help desk calls by 30%. Video usage has increased by 80% with a corresponding drop in travel costs.

Collaboration and communications across continents have been transformed. The US investment in VoIP systems has been protected and enhanced through its integration with the unified communications solution in the UK. All this has been achieved without any capital expenditure or increase in operational costs.

In addition, every aspect of the API wide area network across three continents is now remotely monitored and proactively managed by Nowcomm’s technical support consultants from their network operations centre. Any potential issues are rapidly spotted, logged and rectified. Detailed statistical analysis, trending and performance data is reported back to API every month so that the voice/data infrastructure can be further optimised and refined.

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