

American Sportworks—Hosted IP Voice



American SportWorks is a leading provider of recreational and utility vehicles. The company serves customers throughout North America from its headquarters in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Business Challenge

As a result of its growth, American SportWorks experienced a sharp increase in calls to its inbound call center. The Company's phone system was an aging, inefficient PBX system, and calls were often directed to individual extensions rather than to the dedicated call center, resulting in missed calls or lengthy hold times for customers.

Also, the company's customer service agents used a DOS-based software platform to monitor call queues, which made call management difficult. "The DOS-based system was very outdated," says John Lantz, AmericanSportWorks' Customer Service Manager. "It would put calls on hold in a black hole, sometimes dumping them into a voicemail box we could not find."

Further, the company's reporting abilities were very limited, which affect productivity. "To get agent information or run simple call reports would take hours," Lantz adds. American SportWorks needed a voice communications system that would reduce day-to-day management responsibilities, while providing the flexibility of a full-featured call center environment.

The Appia Solution

Enhanced Network Solutions (ENS), a technology consulting firm based in Fort Wayne, recognized right away that an Appia solution was ideal. They recommended that AmericanSportWorks use a hosted IP voice system for its business communications and add a hosted call center solution that would improve agent productivity and enhance customer service.

While working with ENS and Appia on the design and function of the new call center, American SportWorks requested several specific features. “We needed a display of call queues and agent availability,” recalls Lantz. “We also needed an auto-announce, so that when a call would go in queue because no agents were available, the system would give an audible sound to make everyone in the call center aware.” While addressing these unique requirements, Appia engineers discovered that Cisco’s CallManager software was not set up to support certain functions that American SportWorks needed.

The engineers wrote a custom software solution that enabled the new system to function as requested. “Appia was able to develop the auto-announce feature, which gives us an audible signal and a visual alert on our wall display to alert our agents when a call is waiting in a particular queue,” says Lantz, “This allows us to focus on the customer we’re currently assisting, rather than always watching a monitor to see if there are calls waiting. It also helps us manage the length of our calls and maintain an efficient call turn ratio.”

To improve call monitoring and reporting in the call center, Appia installed a 32-inch flat panel monitor that displays detailed call queue information, including agent availability, current calls, calls on hold, and customer hold time. Management can also view reports on incoming call traffic and agent activity for that day. “The wall display lets me know which agents are available, or not available but could be, and helps us to manage our resources more effectively,” says Lantz.

A new auto-attendant was added that includes self-help options for customers, which Lantz says has helped to reduce incoming call volume. “The auto attendant has allowed us to be more sophisticated in our call routing. Many of our customers can now address inquiries like pricing and product information on our Website, which allows us to handle more inquiries and increase our agent productivity.”

The Results

Jane Habig, Office Manager at American SportWorks, says that customer service has improved significantly since the Appia voice solution was deployed. “We can always rely on our calls always coming through. Since we moved to the Appia system, we haven’t had a single complaint about a call being lost. We sewed up the black hole.”

Habig says the features of the company's new IP phones have improved office productivity, and the scalability of the Appia IP voice solution has saved time and money. "Moves, adds, and changes are physically a lot easier to handle," says Habig, "In order to make changes with our old system, when we would relocate an employee, we'd have to run a new telephone line to their new desk. Now you just move your phone, plug it in at your new desk, and you're up and running with your same extension."

Added features and improved reporting have enabled AmericanSportWorks' call center to operate more efficiently, resulting in shorter calls and reduced staff requirements. "We can now monitor when backup customer service agents are available to take calls during heavy call periods, and make them available when needed," says Lantz.

Lantz and his call center team have also noticed an improvement in call quality with the Appia system. "The voice quality of the Appia IP solution is tremendous. In fact, we find that it's better than our old system with traditional phone lines."

According to Lantz, the overall presentation of the call center is much improved, and he says it has become a point of pride for the management and staff at American SportWorks. "We brag about it a lot when we have our customers visit our facility. We're the standard for customer service in the power sports industry. Our customers have noticed the improvement in our support and customer service, and we can keep getting better."

The Future

American SportWorks is so pleased with the implementation that they've had them deploy an Appia IP voice solution at their Roseland, Louisiana location as well. "That way, when we take a call from a customer that needs technical support for our UTV product, we'll be able to route the call to Roseland for customer support. It'll be huge for our customers, creating a much more consistent level of service," says Lantz.