

Knott's Berry Farm



Customer

- Knott's Berry Farm

Industry

- Entertainment

Challenges

- No connectivity to support Unified Communications (UC)
- System and voice platforms long past end of life
- Lack of contact center metrics

Solution

- UNIVERGE® SV9500 platforms (2), in a CCIS network
- UC for Enterprise suite of applications
- Unified Messaging System (UNIVERGE UM4730)
- UCE Contact Center Suite of applications, including Automatic Call Distribution routing and Global Navigator

Results

- Delivered cost effective migration, leveraging past investments
- Increased contact centers' productivity and efficiency
- Enhanced communications, Mobility, and Messaging
- Improved staffing with smart contact center tools
- Enhanced guest experience, with reduced hold times

Knott's Berry Farm

Located in Buena Park, California, Knott's Berry Farm ("Knott's"/ KBF) is a world famous western-theme amusement park destination, and part of Cedar Fair Entertainment Company, one of the largest regional amusement-resort operators in the world.

Since 1920, Knott's Berry Farm has been drawing fans to central southern California. With beginnings as a small family-owned working berry farm with a popular chicken restaurant, Knott's Berry Farm has evolved into the beautifully laid out, action-packed, 160-acre family fun destination it is today, while creatively retaining its original historic charm.

"Knott's Berry Farm" is actually home to: the Knott's Berry Farm Theme Park, the Knott's Berry Farm Hotel, and Knott's "Soak City" Water Park. The Knott's theme park began as an Old West experience with authentic Ghost Town area. This was expanded with roller coasters and other rides, as well as restaurants, award-winning entertainment shows, and a variety of interesting shops, some of which distribute proprietary Knott's Berry Farm products. The resort hotel, located steps away from the park entrance, is a "home away from home" for grown-ups, but with a specially designed wing for families who enjoy the "Peanuts" comic strip characters, a franchise exclusive to Cedar Fair Entertainment.

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Guests of Knott's Berry Farm can book individual passes, group tickets, or full vacation packages, either online or in person, and may also contact a sales team that handles group sales, including catered events. A separate call center books guest accommodations at the resort hotel. All KBF business operations are on site in the park's Buena Park location.

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Challenges

Behind the scenes, in the business offices, of major concern were the aging components of the legacy communication system, as the NEC UNIVERGE® NEAX® 2400 platform and Octel® voice messaging had far exceeded their end of life. The system had served them well in the past, but could no longer meet the more advanced requirements of its call center operations and the needs of their back office departmental communications. The entire existing system functionality was basic, without Caller ID, Mobility, call center features, or Unified Messaging with ability to view and listen to voice messages within their email platform. The existing systems also functioned separately, without connectivity to support a Unified Communications (UC) experience for executives, managers, call center agents, or guests.

“One of the concerns we had with our old system,” said Christina Luna, Manager of Guest Services, “was having no call information reporting features. No way to see how many calls we received per day, to have the appropriate staff in place to handle them.” Claudette Vogelsang, Knott’s Berry Farm’s Vice President of Finance, confirmed, “There were no call metrics. We didn’t have that information.”

Knott’s executives began an extensive search for the right solution. Their situation definitely required a more powerful UC solution, one that could fully network and support both properties going forward, and allow for the mobility of personnel; a more robust contact center solution, one with application support and with the ability to manage call flows between the properties. Management tools for the administration of staff



were also needed to help deal with busier peak seasons, reduce hold times and improve the experience for guest callers. A scalable system was critical to allow for future growth, however, there was an interest in leveraging continued use of some of their legacy equipment. Another component involved being able to deploy IP Telephony in key areas to support administrative and management users with enhanced feature functionality. The new system must also have the ability to support Session Initiation Protocol (SIP), to reduce carrier costs and facilitate enhanced services.

“With thousands of end points being supported, this system has simplified that management.”

Knott’s Berry Farm was challenged with the decision to either completely replace their aged working system, or to move forward with a system upgrade by migrating to a platform that could integrate with existing technology in order to fully support the optimum functionality and improved overall operational efficiency the Knott’s operation now required.

Solution

After conducting their due diligence with many other vendor comparisons and demos, finally, in consideration of their history of satisfaction with NEC solutions and support over the years, Knott’s Berry Farm chose to migrate to the powerful NEC UNIVERGE® SV9500 UC platform. This UNIVERGE SV9500 smart enterprise solution supports a full suite of applications, promotes true business agility, and enables smooth communications for the contact centers, internal business office departments, and between all three properties, while also enhancing the guest experience.

The system upgrade included two (2) UNIVERGE SV9500 platforms, in a Common-Channel Interoffice Signaling (CCIS) network, one running the amusement park and the other serving the on-property resort hotel. For this migration, the ability to integrate the new system with existing NEC architecture also delivered the most cost effective, efficient choice for the entire operation. Past investments were leveraged, with most NEC PIM



cards re-chipped and repurposed for the deployment of the UNIVERGE SV9500 platform. The VoIP deployment allowed for a single cable plant and Local Area Network (LAN) to serve both voice and data applications.

Deployment was scheduled for after park operation hours, with ample time for testing and carrier migrations, resulting in a smooth transition with zero downtime. Following installation of the SV9500 platform, advanced unified communications applications were deployed for the contact centers as well as the business offices. As Knott's IT Director, Bill Grissom, confirmed, "The switchover was done after hours, and the transition was flawless."

Ms. Vogelsang shared, "This was a big project, a massive undertaking. I was worried about outages--how long they might last, and downtime... but NEC has worked very closely with us. Their knowledge of the park is extensive, and their knowledge of their solutions is even more extensive. The cutover went smoothly. It was a very exciting moment, and the fact that there were no glitches made everyone very happy."

Global Navigator (GNAV) Pro Client Supervisor was an important addition for Knott's contact center operations. GNAV allows operational visibility to their agent activity, and it effectively monitors the centers' call traffic levels, providing detailed metrics reporting to management.

The implementation of UC Automatic Call Distribution (CallCenterWorX@-ACD) was critical to optimizing call handling capabilities through efficient call routing. This UC for Enterprise Contact Center Suite application smartly manages incoming call flows, and routing between call centers. UC ACD answers the call, gives a message to the caller, and places the call in queue for a particular set of agents, ensuring responsiveness and increasing call center efficiency for a positive first experience as a Knott's Berry Farm guest.

The Park and Hotel now share a single Unified Messaging system (UNIVERGE UM4730) for voicemail and Automated Attendant for all departments, with customizable company voice prompts, deployed on an NEC R120 general purpose server. Multiple conversational interfaces give Knott's users immediate access to UM4730 via the telephone. Since the UM4730 has the ability to emulate the Octel and Centigram Telephone User Interface (TUI), this means an easy transition to the UM4730, with little or no user training required.

For Knott's contact centers, NEC's UC Agent (UNIVERGE UC700) was deployed to increase productivity with its enhanced call center

functionality unified with UC capabilities. By providing specific ACD call queue and split information directly to agents' desktops, together with instant messaging, group chat, video conferencing and collaboration with colleagues, UC Agent enables agents to work with callers more responsively and efficiently. ViewMail for internal communication efficiency with Microsoft Messaging was included, a desktop application which displays when the user has a voicemail, and, when integrated with Outlook, directs voicemails to their email inbox for easy access.

Connectivity and resource sharing across both properties was established by utilizing their existing fiber, which also provided a backup for both locations, and an effective and low cost disaster recovery solution.

NEC's support worked closely with Knott's Berry Farm's IT staff on this system upgrade, for a smooth, cost effective migration solution for both Park and Hotel properties, with no downtime or disruption to business communications or operations.

Results

Bill Grissom, IT Director, reported, "While the new NEC system allows so much increased functionality for all three separate entities, the Park, the Hotel, and Soak City, one of the things I most appreciate about this solution is its ease of administration. With thousands of end points being supported, this system has simplified that management."

Global Navigator's customized call metrics now assist in staffing the centers appropriately, to greatly reduce caller hold times. GNAV provides supervisors with the real-time visibility, call load metrics, and agent information needed for improved staff training and management, more informed administration, and to anticipate and manage traffic levels.

Ms. Vogelsang, V.P. of Finance, stated, "Knowing the number of calls coming in, and number of calls on hold, this information allows us to staff appropriately—especially during our peak seasons." Ms. Luna, agreed, "I get daily call reports now, so we can review and adjust our staffing. If we know that last year on this date we had a high call load, I can now staff accordingly."

Ms. Luna added, "Global Navigator also gives us 'live auditing'. We can listen to hear what types of guest inquiries are made and how an operator responds, for better administrative feedback. Also, knowing what kinds of questions are most asked is important, since the system gives us the

ability to put the FAQ up front in our auto-messaging.” Having control of Automated Attendant greetings (and the time-of-day/ day-of-week/ holiday control over call answering and routing) has made a measurable difference in the efficiency of the call flow, with less hold time and a better customer experience.

Knott's Berry Farm now has a highly reliable unified communications solution with state-of-the art functionality for optimum business operations. This upgrade was strategically planned and installed through a cost-effective migration, able to utilize existing technology protocols essential for interoperability.

“The switchover was done after hours, and the transition was flawless.”

With NEC's UNIVERGE SV9500 platform deployed, and UC for Enterprise suite of applications as well as NEC's UCE Contact Center suite in place, a robust architecture now supports a smart enterprise solution that has improved the way Knott's Berry Farm manages its daily business processes. Through this transition, the operation has realized an increase in productivity and call efficiency, with a positive impact on the Knott's Berry Farm management and contact center staff, which ultimately influences the total guest experience.

NEC's Relationship with Our Customer

With a long history of support for this customer and an in-depth understanding of Knott's Berry Farm's unique business challenges, NEC's system integrators have built a strong relationship with this organization.

Bill Grissom, Knott's IT Director, shared, “My day-to-day job here at Knott's is about providing support. The partnership with NEC has been outstanding, and very beneficial to my management of all communications in this environment.”

“It was a very down-to-earth team,” said Claudette Vogelsang. “They weren't trying to sell us ‘bells and whistles’—but just what we needed, and we could add the bells and whistles as we wanted to. The cost savings was a driving factor, as well as the relationship with NEC, which has been a partnership of trust over these many years, and the support has been great.

“I would highly recommend NEC.” Ms. Vogelsang concluded. “They've been really good partners, both through the technology they delivered as well as the support they've given us--it's been excellent.”

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