Global architecture firm implements a ShoreTel UC solution across five continents for cost-effective phone management, enhanced functionality and ease of use, and outstanding VoIP reliability.

Most architects know that designs are never imposed—they evolve from a foundation of processes and principles applied to the particulars of the project, transforming ideas into functional art. The architects at Gensler also believe design is one of the most powerful strategic tools for securing lasting competitive advantage for its clients. That belief is reflected in a portfolio of spectacular architectural feats peppered around the world.

Founded in 1965, Gensler is headquartered in San Francisco, California, with 38 offices and 3,000 professionals located across five continents. Gensler is one of the world’s largest architecture firms, and is consistently ranked by U.S. and international industry surveys as a leading force behind enduring design and sustainability. From environmentally-conscious LEED pedigreed airports and groundbreaking mixed-use projects to sleek towers and well-orchestrated planned communities, Gensler designs consistently display innovation and functionality at their best.

“Architecture is a collaborative business. We don’t make anything alone. On a building project, we’re talking with engineers, fire life safety personnel, plumbers, electricians, and dozens of other contractors working with us at any given time. So communication is a big part of what we do. We pick up the phone to make things happen,” says Bruce Bartolf, principal and chief technology officer at Gensler.

When the firm needed to architect a better way to secure and unify communications throughout its growing organization, ShoreTel emerged with the strategic blueprints for comprehensive simplicity, survivability, and savings.

Considering Best Practices for Global VoIP Design

While Gensler’s business was booming, its existing Nortel Meridian PBX phone systems were aging. The firm was expanding into new geographies, new offices, and was making many phone changes and moves. Gensler was facing major system upgrade costs simply to
ShoreTel and Gensler

expands to handle additional users. Then, when the global economic downturn forced Gensler to trim its workforce, Bartolf was left with many extra phones and a need for extensively flexible telephony.

“We needed to move toward a voice over IP platform that would be reliable, easy to manage and allow for efficient communication, regardless of where and how we grow. A new solution would also need to integrate with Nortel at least for the remainder of that system’s lifecycle, and we were very interested in superior voice quality, too,” Bartolf explains.

He also wanted to ensure that his new VoIP solution would adhere to best practices such as simplicity while scaling up or down, and communications survivability regardless of network availability. Gensler initially selected another VoIP vendor to integrate and transition with the Nortel system, but there were many complexities involved in the deployment, creating delays that interrupted business operations. In looking for an alternative, Bartolf created a “bake-off” between ShoreTel and two other vendors. “PacketFusion was able to install ShoreTel and run a complete UC solution including integration into the existing Nortel in less than two hours. The other vendors took seven to ten days just to set up their test systems. That, even more than the bake-off, demonstrated the ShoreTel advantage,” he continues.

Evolving Unified Communications with ShoreTel

Gensler selected a ShoreTel UC Solution to deploy across its organization, based on ShoreTel IP Phones, ShoreTel Communicator, and ShoreTel Voice Switches. The initial focus was integration with the existing Nortel gear at offices struggling with growth, with latter integration with Avaya systems already in place. ShoreTel was first installed in the New York and Chicago offices, where systems were integrated.

“Since then, we methodically deployed ShoreTel bit by bit across the U.S. and across the globe until it completely replaced our Nortel and Avaya deployment. The great story here is that we gained a phenomenally easy-to-manage, feature-rich VoIP system that is less expensive to operate and scale, which really helps during economic downturns—and upturns as well. “Having a reliable system is important. Our customers are Fortune 500—they expect us to do things on their scale. ShoreTel gives us affordable scalability while reducing operational complexity.”

The ShoreTel UC Solution today comprises more than 3,400 IP Phones and the entire worldwide system is standardized on three voice switches. ShoreTel Communicator adds universal simplicity for sharing information and streamlining workflows, from Gensler desktops, mobile devices, and any phone connected to the network.

As part of this advanced UC implementation, ShoreTel is providing unified messaging and fostering real-time collaboration for today’s changing work environments. The ShoreTel UC system is fully integrated with voicemail, email, and calendars, including Microsoft Outlook—all through a single interface. Now, Gensler architects and other staff are able to collaborate, to make things happen—with or without picking up the phones—because ShoreTel Communicator creates a softphone on the desktop, so that users have more choices about how to rapidly connect, confer, and gain visibility about callers.

“From London and Doha, to China and Japan, and from North America to Costa Rica and Thailand, we literally have this affordable, simple and reliable communications platform that is night and day from our previous solutions,” Bartolf adds.

Advanced Architecture and Simple, Clean Lines

ShoreTel’s innovative communications platform facilitates extensive simplification, enabling Bartolf to trim the time and resources required to manage installations, changes, and daily administration of the whole system worldwide. “We used to have four staffers to handle phone-related tasks. Now with ShoreTel, we have less than a full-time dedicated position, a total of two full-time employees working part-time to manage the entire system, and we’re still able to do all our own installs and all the moves/adds/changes for each office. And using ShoreTel’s extension assignment makes expansion so easy. In fact, we’re
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Bruce Bartolf
Principal and Chief Technology Officer, Gensler

ShoreTel relies on open systems IP technology for seamless integration of Gensler’s geographically dispersed workgroups into a single-image phone system that is easy and cost effective to manage. ShoreTel’s fully distributed architecture allows Gensler to easily scale up or down to accommodate business needs while providing automatic failover and redundancy for greater availability of phone systems. “The fact that our ShoreTel platform is not tied into the network like other call manager servers is critical to a better survivability rate. With ShoreTel, we can distribute among regions, we can control the setup, and we have the failover, the simplicity, the functionality. We can optimize hardware and software very easily, as offices grow or shrink. Not too long ago, we reallocated underutilized ShoreTel equipment during the recession to replace a legacy NEC PBX in Los Angeles, by using phones, switches, and freed-up licenses,” he furthers. “We wound up replacing the NEC with ShoreTel for less than the cost of maintaining it for a year.”

Another ShoreTel feature Bartolf mentions is least-cost routing, the process of selecting the path of outbound communications traffic based on cost. ShoreTel uses automated, policy-based network selection and least-cost routing to help reduce costly cellular charges for global enterprises with multiple points-of-presence, such as Gensler. Calls are instead routed through VoIP and Wi-Fi to the closest access number, for an order of magnitude savings.

**Building an Enduring Foundation for Savings**

Gensler is one of the more sophisticated ShoreTel implementations, yet simplicity and savings continue as the firm morphs and grows. “We are looking forward to some of the advanced things that ShoreTel is planning, such as ubiquity of integrations and mobile technologies. Whether people are on SIP, cell phones, Skype, or home analog lines—ShoreTel facilitates the ability to control it all through one system, one intuitive platform,” Bartolf says.

Bartolf credits the ShoreTel implementation with helping Gensler to eliminate 70 percent of its maintenance costs and saving headcount expenses. Gensler has just celebrated its final PBX replacement in Shanghai, China for a complete ShoreTel implementation.

“ShoreTel is focused on end user interface and operational simplicity. That’s what I rely on ShoreTel to do for us. ShoreTel is less expensive to manage, easy to install, and simple to use. It’s about total cost of ownership.” I’m a fan of getting technology that works. That, quite simply, is ShoreTel,” he concludes.

**About ShoreTel**

ShoreTel is a provider of business communication solutions whose brilliantly simple unified communications platforms, applications and mobile UC solutions promise a new rhythm of workforce engagement and collaboration. With costly complexity eliminated by design from its award winning, all-in-one IP phone system, UC and contact center solution, and its industry leading hosted business phone system, workers enjoy a freedom and self-reliance that other providers can’t match. Users have full control to engage and collaborate, no matter the time, place or device, for the lowest cost and demand on IT resources in the industry. ShoreTel is headquartered in Sunnyvale, California, and has regional offices and partners worldwide. For more information, visit shoretel.com or shoretelsky.com