



RH Page Turns Over New Comms Leaf

Retail fitout specialist RH Page has turned over a new leaf in communications, replacing an outgrown analogue phone system with an IP telephony setup...

Moving to the Cisco unified communications platform was a matter of necessity, says RH Page general manager Andy Pitcher, because the existing system couldn't cope with additional phone extensions for the growing business.

Having met that immediate need, RH Page now has a state-of-the-art communications infrastructure on which to build as new technology comes along.

"We had some really basic requirements but we were looking to the future as well," Pitcher says.

RH Page, a fourth-generation family business set up in west Auckland in 1897, designs and builds shop fitouts. Most of its customers are 20 to 50-store retail chains, and about half its business is in Australia, where it has a Melbourne office.

Customers include Michael Hill Jeweller, Bunnings Warehouse and Paper Plus, and cosmetics makers, for

whom RH Page makes display cases.

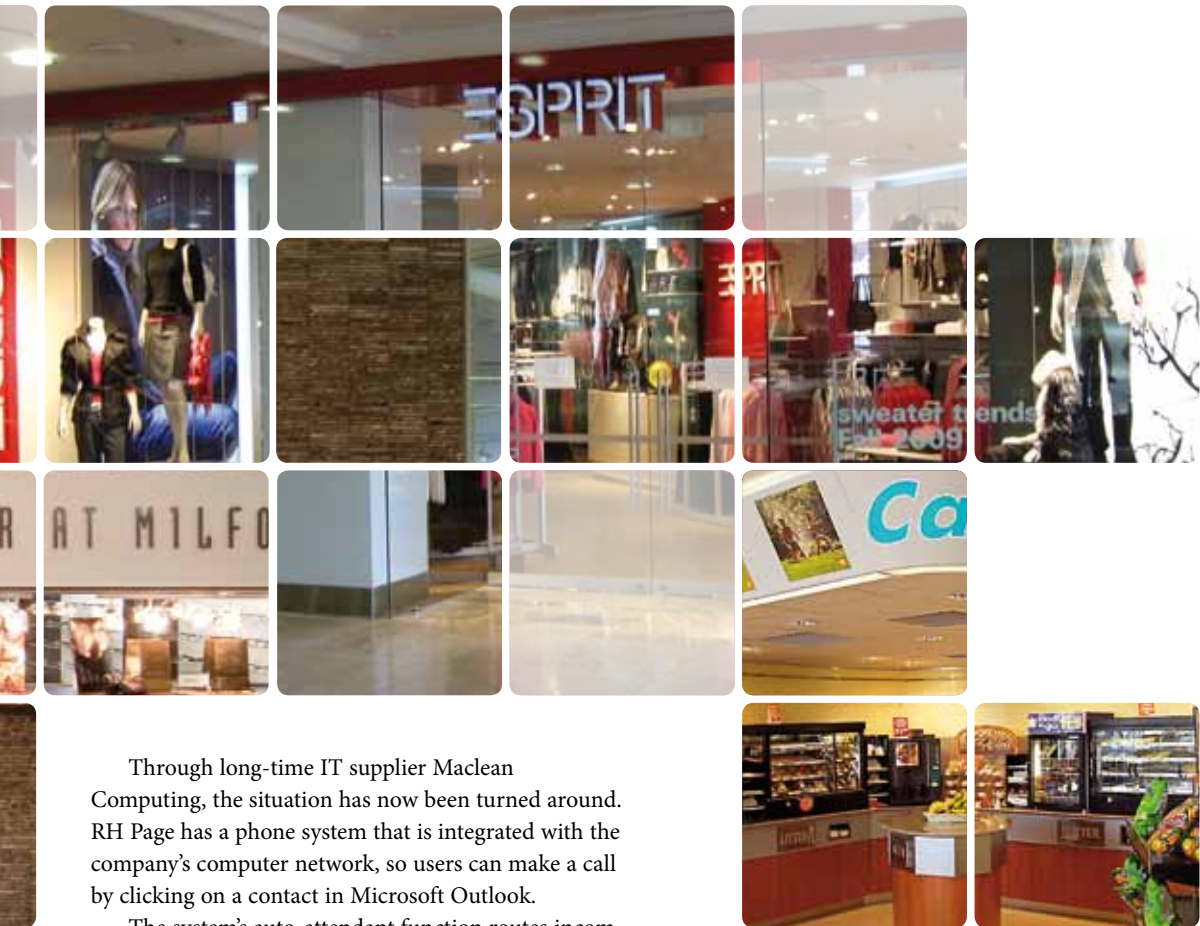
Relationships with customers are changing, Pitcher says, as the company becomes more design-centric.

"We've moved away from the traditional model of simply building things to now looking at meeting our clients' requirements in a more holistic manner. We're adopting a lifecycle approach to managing our clients' requirements and becoming far more of a business partner for them."

But it's hard to have a meaningful partner relationship if you don't have a phone, which was the case for some RH Page staff. Nor did the company have voice-mail. And on top of that, the administrative side of the business was inefficient.

"We needed to be able to give our staff telephone extensions, which some of them didn't have. It's absurd, but how are you going to grow your business if you can't give someone a phone," Pitcher says.

“All three initiatives give us a really solid, reliable platform from which we get some immediate gains, but we can also confidently predict, when and if new technology presents itself, we have the capability to take advantage of it.”
Andy Pitcher, general manager



Through long-time IT supplier Maclean Computing, the situation has now been turned around. RH Page has a phone system that is integrated with the company's computer network, so users can make a call by clicking on a contact in Microsoft Outlook.

The system's auto-attendant function routes incoming calls to the appropriate extension, so that in 90 per cent of cases no operator intervention is required. Voicemail is forwarded as email attachments to users' Outlook inboxes, which staff in the field can access from Blackberry smartphones. And a new computer server has been installed.

The system supplied by Maclean Computing is Cisco's UC500, a unified communications setup for small businesses, a key component of which is Unified CallConnector. CallConnector handles call control, presence and mobility features through an Outlook and Internet Explorer toolbar.

A new phone system might not sound revolutionary, but for Pitcher, who joined RH Page 18 months ago, it's a piece of the jigsaw that will help the business expand.

"It's exciting for me because it was one of a number of low-hanging fruit ripe for the picking, so it was a real no-brainer. But not every organisation is in the position of having such an easy gain."

The immediate payback is a 75 per cent cut in the firm's administrative overhead, although not all of that is attributable to the phone system, Pitcher says.

"What we're seeing here is a convergence between telephony and computing. The wider story is really that we replaced our server with a new SBS [small


business server] machine, at the same time we introduced Blackberrys, and we have this new auto-attendant telephone system.

"All three initiatives give us a really solid, reliable platform from which we get some immediate gains, but we can also confidently predict, when and if new technology presents itself, we have the capability to take advantage of it."

Such tools are like "hygiene factors" — the basics needed to be competitive, Pitcher says.

It gives the company confidence to try out new communication modes like video-conferencing between staff carrying out installations and designers.

"That's probably the most significant initiative we're trialling at the moment. It doesn't actually take our phone system to achieve that but it's part of our communications strategy to ensure we get information from one party to the next reliably and quickly and are able to use that information in a meaningful fashion.

"If you were to look at the organisation a year ago compared to what it is now, it's been quite a significant transformation — but it needed to be. They're all important infrastructure tools and we'll keep building on that." 



 **CASE STUDY**
> RH Page

 **AT A GLANCE**

Business Objective

> Implement a phone system that would enable the addition of new extensions to allow for company growth. The system should have automatic call routing capability to free-up the staff member whose full-time job was answering the phones. The system should have voicemail and desktop messaging so staff could provide increased customer service, being able to check messages while in the field.

Solution

> Cisco UC500 Unified Communications platform

Business Benefits

> A full-time receptionist to answer phones is no longer needed, contributing to significantly greater administrative productivity. Project managers working on-site are now able to receive voicemail as email attachments accessed via Blackberry smartphones. The ability to call contacts from within Microsoft Outlook, and recognise callers whose numbers are stored in Outlook, contribute to better customer service. An integrated phone and computer network gives the company a platform on which to add new technology as it becomes available.

 **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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