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Government Breaking Free of Traditional PBX Vendors (Bicom Systems)

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- **Overview**

In 1998, the Ontario government enacted the Legal Aid Services Act in which the province renewed and strengthened its commitment to legal aid. The Act established Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), an independent but publicly funded and publicly accountable non-profit corporation, to administer the province's legal aid program.

Ten years later the organization found itself with a bursting central office and 200 offices across the province. The demands of staff, lawyers and individuals receiving assistance had also increased substantially over the period too. The traditional phone system would do no more and as with any not-for-profit government organization there was also the need to be accountable for taxpayers' money.



- **Challenge**

Legal Aid Ontario was facing a colossal challenge by the standards of any organization. The challenge was all the more as momentous as the movement to new premises was brought forward leaving only three months planning for the completion of the deployment.

Not only was a solid central system required to support the provincial office with 450 users, but it needed to support multiple call centre operations that would permit agents to be measured efficiently in their service to customers. The system also would need to have the ability to expand its network to the regional offices. This was in part to create a uniform dial plan allowing LAO to save in long distance costs, but above all to permit a dedicated core team to centrally manage from a uniform interface and remove additional training burdens.



- **Solution**

Stan Yazhensky, Manager of IT Operations at LAO, an Open Source enthusiast, had done some line coding of his own solutions with Open Source Telephony Platforms. However, for LAO, his purpose was to provide a warranted solution with feature rich reporting and functions that could be networked easily with the guarantee of support.

Following extensive testing of different commercial and Open Source based solutions, PBXware at Bicom Systems was selected and deployed in some of LAO's satellite offices without any issues. However, to provide a "best-fit" for management requirements for the province wide deployment, the solution needed some specific custom work.

- **Implementation**

From Stan's previous experience, he was confident that his team could 'complete the implementation themselves' rather than expending heavily on external costs getting to know the building over many weeks. Still time was tight and fore-planning with the Bicom Systems Team was of great assistance.

In March 2008, servers were made available and software was loaded, both two quad core CPUs with 8 GB RAM. The call centre was provided with a dedicated server and provincial office's 450 users were provided with a failover back-up in a second location. A mix of Polycom phones were selected for their quality and the range of phones offered and a Sangoma A104D to provide interface to the T1 Circuits.

Tracy Chen, Senior Network Administrator, lead LAO's implementation, and Senad Jordanovic provided the lead support role from Bicom Systems. One surprisingly simple aspect was the integration with other third-party gateways and some historic PBXs. Everything simply clicked together.



- **Results**

In May 2008, everything was in place. The call centre supervisors were the first to start. The immediate impression was the simplicity of the control. After a half-day's training, supervisors were able to log agents on and off both in the office and at home. This flexibility helped to ensure that busy times were met and that service could continue even if adverse weather conditions prevented staff from travelling into the office.

Statistics provided by the call centre edition allow supervisors to identify performance and assist agents over the course of the month. Online monitoring and whispering meant for direct interventions assisted with specific caller inquiries.

Provincial office's 450 staff members were up and running and networked with existing PBXware deployments across the province into a single dial plan. "It simply takes less time than the traditional systems we had before," said Tracy Chen. "I now have the control I need to add on each extra office as it goes live." All for a fraction of the cost of traditional phone systems!