

Case Study: IVR Platform Vendor Prepares for the Future with PIKA

Versicom Communications prides itself on simplifying the lives of its customers. The company's flagship product, ABCVoice, is an interactive voice response (IVR) system that frees organizations from having to answer and direct routine customer phone calls. Used primarily by tax preparation companies, the system automatically provides clients with the status of their tax returns, saving the firms a great deal of time during their busiest time of year - tax season.

But helping customers operate more efficiently isn't always an easy task for Versicom. "We have to modify our product every year because tax laws are always changing," explains Mark Snyder, Vice President of Versicom Technologies. "And once tax season starts, we don't have much time to send out patches or upgrades so we have to get our product right the first time."

Searching for a Platform

Because of the frequent product changes and upgrades, Versicom's main requirement for its ABCVoice solution is a stable and reliable hardware platform. "Reliability is the most important thing to us," says Snyder. "Our customers are spread across the country and we can't afford to have our equipment fail on them. The last thing we want to do is hop on a plane to change out a board at a customer site."

In its search for a stable platform, Versicom tried a number of hardware solutions from a variety of vendors. "We went through several different board platforms over the years," recalls Snyder. "Once we settled on a platform that proved to be stable, we realized that reliability wasn't the only thing we needed - we needed a platform that could evolve with us as our product matured."

A New Direction

In addition to the yearly modifications Versicom made to its solution, the company was also thinking about the future. Versicom eventually wants to offer ABCVoice as a hosted service rather than the traditional turnkey-based systems residing at client sites, and to be prepared for the impact of voice-over Internet protocol (VOIP) technology. "We weren't confident that our board vendor at the time would work with us to address our needs and future plans, so we started thinking about examining other options once again," Snyder remembers.

So, when Versicom's trusted systems integration partner, Applied Telephony, began talking about PIKA Technologies and its platform, Snyder took note. Applied Telephony had worked with PIKA in the past and had a strong working relationship with the company. "John McQuade from Applied Technology felt very strongly about PIKA," says Snyder. "He talked about his past success with the company and knew it had over two decades of experience in the industry. After just a few

Customer: Versicom Communications Inc. produces the ABCVoice product suite - an automated interactive voice response (IVR) solution for tax preparation firms. The solution lets clients hear the status of their tax return over the phone and requires no human interaction.

Challenge: To ensure the solution's board platform would be flexible enough to handle future product applications based on a hosted service model or voice-over-Internet protocol (VOIP) technology.

Solution: Standardize on the PIKA platform using PIKA PrimeNet MM Quad Span and InLine technologies.

Benefits: Versicom can easily migrate customers from their existing turnkey client-based solution to a simpler hosted service model; the company can take advantage of future technologies such as VOIP; the reliability of PIKA boards will allow Versicom to continue to provide a stable solution to customers.

discussions with John, we gave him the go-ahead to create a scripting language to help us port our solution over to PIKA."

In just a few months, Applied Telephony had successfully ported the ABCVoice solution to the PIKA platform. "PIKA's support team was very responsive throughout the project," recalls John McQuade, Principal Software Engineer at Applied Telephony. "The project was one of the first to use the high level GrandPrix API, but PIKA kept the development process moving forward and on track. Any issues that came up during the development cycle were always handled in a professional and timely manner."

After the successful port to the PIKA platform, Versicom began migrating customers to the new technology with ease. "Already, we're finding that the PIKA boards are very stable in the field," says Snyder. "But more importantly, we've built a strong business relationship with the company. Right from the beginning, we felt like we could tell PIKA what we were looking for and they'd listen."

He adds, "PIKA's overall direction is more in line with where our company plans to go. PIKA is knowledgeable of VOIP technologies and has been able to explain to us where their product is going down the road. That communication is something we've never seen with previous vendors."

Looking to the Future

Now that Versicom has standardized on the PIKA platform, Snyder feels even better prepared to evolve the products and offer customers the most efficient and effective IVR solutions. "Our goal to migrate customers to a hosted solution will be easier and more cost effective now that we're using PIKA technology," he says. "With a hosted solution, we need to lease rackspace, and PIKA's two-port T1 cards don't eat up as much real estate as those of our previous vendor. So we anticipate some real cost savings there."

Snyder also feels that he will be better able to stay on top of new voice technologies due to the close relationship his company has forged with PIKA. "This whole industry is changing so quickly that it's almost impossible for one person to keep tabs on everything," says Snyder. "So, I rely on companies like PIKA to keep me informed about new technologies and how my company can apply them. In the past, our other providers have dropped the ball on keeping us informed, but PIKA has been there for us from the start and we're really optimistic about our future."

About Applied Telephony

Applied Telephony provides telephony consulting and software development services. With over 12 years of experience, Applied Telephony has developed and deployed telephony applications for customers worldwide. From custom switching solutions to IVR engines, Applied Telephony has the vision and experience to develop unique solutions for its customers. For more information about Applied Telephony's products and services, visit www.appliedtelephony.com.

About PIKA Technologies

PIKA Technologies designs and manufactures computer plug in voice cards and software that connect a computer system to both TDM- and IP-based networks to provide advanced voice services. For almost two decades PIKA Technologies has been serving companies around the world that require voice cards to design sophisticated phone services for recording systems, voice services applications, and PC-PBX systems. The company has built a reputation for delivering innovative products and exceptional technical support by working closely with its customers. Headquartered in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, the company has ranked in The Branham300, an authoritative ranking of successful Canadian high tech firms, for five consecutive years. Visit www.pikatechnologies.com or call +1-613-591-1555 for more information.



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