Industry: Professional Services/Real Estate
Installation: 15 sites, 34 ShoreGear voice switches, 600+ ShorePhone IP telephones, Contact Center
Date of Install: 2006

Challenge:

Century 21 M&M and Associates was faced with a hosted VoIP solution that was unstable and underperforming. In addition, the real estate agency wanted an in-house solution that would help it establish a call center to process leads more efficiently and improve its lead-to-sale conversion ratio.

Solution:

ShoreTel provided the real estate organization its Contact Center solution, an integrated suite of applications on the distributed ShoreTel IP telephony system, including ShoreGear voice switches and ShorePhone IP phones. Enterprise Contact Center is used to ensure callers reach people—not voice mail—thereby vastly improving Century 21 M&M and Associates' customer service.

Benefits:

- Century 21 M&M and Associates has saved in management costs as well as personnel costs because the system is easy to administer and Contact Center has enabled the organization to improve the productivity of its call center agents.
- ShoreTel Contact Center provides call center agents with in-depth caller information to help them provide exceptional customer service.
- ShoreTel Contact Center helps Century 21 M&M and Associates process leads more efficiently and improves its lead-to-sale conversion ratio.
- The ShoreTel phone system and Contact Center have enabled Century 21 M&M and Associates to centralize its call center and distribute calls centrally. This new approach is more efficient and helps the organization shorten the sales cycle and attract and retain quality real estate agents.

SHORETEL CONTACT CENTER HELPS LEADING CENTURY 21 AGENCY CONVERT MORE LEADS TO SALES AND BOOST BOTTOM LINE

Century 21 M&M and Associates Deploys ShoreTel System and Sees Immediate Business Gains and Customer Service Enhancements

Century 21 M&M and Associates, based in Modesto, California, began in 1994 with John N. Melo and Larry A. Matos and two Realtors®. Today, the company has over 700 award-winning associates and staff in 15 locations throughout San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno and lower Sacramento counties. Century 21 M&M and Associates has been the recipient of the 2100 Cup Award, the award presented to the company of the year that lives up to the high standards and values designated by the Century 21® System.

MEETING TELEPHONY REQUIREMENTS OF A BUSINESS ON THE MOVE

In late 2005, Century 21 M&M and Associates had a hosted Voice over IP (VoIP) telephone solution that was not offering the stability and performance the organization had hoped for. In addition, the company wanted to expand its IT platform and manage the telephone system from in-house because as it was, it had no control over changes or issues on the network. Any problems or performance issues that had to be addressed and solved often took a long time and fell short of Century 21 M&M and Associates' expectations. The company decided to look for a phone system that it would bring in-house, one that was scalable to accommodate future growth, and most importantly, one that would allow the organization to implement a call center that would give them more information about where their leads were coming from, help them process those leads more efficiently and improve their lead-to-sale conversion ratio.

"Real estate is a mobile business so we wanted a phone system and a call center that would provide features to meet our specific requirements and allow us to better manage that business," said Kevin Kaplan, Senior Vice President of Century 21 M&M and Associates.

Century 21 M&M and Associates contacted IP telephony vendors and requested proposals, and it eventually came down to two of the IP telephony leaders: Nortel and ShoreTel™. They spoke with engineers, saw demonstrations, spoke with customer references, and worked with the systems. Century 21 M&M and Associates also seriously considered staying with their hosted solution from Covad Communications, investigating whether there were some changes that could be made to make their service more stable, higher performing and feature rich. In the end, it came down to solution flexibility, functionality, cost-effectiveness, scalability, and ease of management, and Century 21 M&M and Associates chose ShoreTel.

ShoreTel™

"ShoreTel seems to have been designed for a business like ours—it's a perfect fit for a business that requires flexibility and changes on the fly."

– Kevin Kaplan
Senior Vice President,
Century 21 M&M and Associates

"The ShoreTel solutions offered more functionality at a lower price—it's just a more cost-effective solution," said Kaplan. "We really like ShoreTel's Contact Center functionality for the call center, and ShoreTel gives us more flexibility for the future to manage the business more effectively."

THE SWITCHOVER

Working together, the ShoreTel reseller and ShoreTel provided Century 21 M&M and Associates with one ShoreGear®-T1 switch in each of its 14 branches and two for its Modesto headquarters. In addition, Century 21 M&M and Associates has deployed three ShoreGear-120, eight ShoreGear-60, and seven ShoreGear-40 voice switches throughout its network, for a total of 34 switches across 15 locations. Century 21 M&M and Associates has more than 600 ShorePhone™ IP telephones throughout the organization, including models 110, 530, and 560.

RAISING THE BAR ON CONTACT

ShoreTel's Contact Center is an integrated application suite on the ShoreTel distributed IP communications platform. Contact Center allows Century 21 M&M and Associates' 700 agents and employees to be located anywhere and administrators to manage the suite of applications from a single user interface. With the ShoreTel solution in place, Century 21 M&M and Associates' call center processes approximately 4,000 to 5,000 calls per week, or 500-800 calls per day, with a large percentage of these calls being new leads so it's imperative that these calls be answered quickly and by an agent with adequate skill and information. With Contact Center in place, call center agents receive calls and are able to quickly look up the listing agent for any given property, using the organization's Lead Router system, and direct the call to whichever number the listing agent prefers at that given time. If the listing agent is not at the number currently listed in his or her preferences in Personal Call Manager™, the call is automatically transferred to the agent's cell phone. In addition, the single distributed voice network facilitates teamwork and enables virtual workgroups, and calls can be routed across sites anywhere on the ShoreTel network—not just within the same physical location.

"We've actually been able to better manage our business with ShoreTel and minimize how many people we need to answer the phone at any given time because we can leverage people across locations," said Kaplan. "We save money by better utilizing our existing staff because of the ShoreTel implementation."

"The ShoreTel phone system and the Contact Center application have enabled Century 21 M&M and Associates to re-invent the process by which a real estate company does business," said Kaplan. "We've been able to establish a centralized call center and distribute calls from there. Normally, real estate offices are not centralized but rather callers reach a branch office and may not receive a controlled, high level of service. This is a new approach, to centralize calls and distribute calls centrally from there. With ShoreTel, we're able to have calls come to the call center and agents can then distribute calls to the agent on whatever phone they have chosen. It ensures that the customer reaches his or her agent quickly without going into voice mail or hearing automated prompts, which can be frustrating when you're in the process of buying or selling a home. Each agent also has his or her own direct inward dialing, or DID, number, as well as a FAX DID number. This

gives them direct access as well as security. These ShoreTel features help us attract and retain quality real estate agents, improve customer service, and minimize response times."

Century 21 M&M and Associates also utilizes ShoreTel's hunt groups capability for non-sales related calls, which ensures that live calls are answered by having primary and backup agents. With hunt groups, when a person is on the phone or unavailable, calls are routed to another extension, preventing callers from unnecessarily reaching voice mail. Calls can also be routed to the receptionist and if the receptionist doesn't answer, the call can then be sent back to the intended person's voice mail.

Finally, ShoreTel's powerful Find Me feature allows agents to configure the system so that callers reach them—for instance, on their cell phone or home phone. If the person does not answer any of their phones, the call reverts back to the ShoreTel voice mail system. It is important that real estate agents always remain accessible to their clients and the Find Me feature is especially useful for real estate agents with a lot of active listings who are out showing properties often. ShoreTel helps them remain in touch.

"With ShoreTel, the buyer reaches the right listing agent faster and this can shorten the sales cycle and help us avoid losing the sale," said Kaplan. "That's tremendous."

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EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY BENEFITS BOTTOM LINE

ShoreTel phone systems are easy to use, flexible, and reliable. With the ShoreTel system in place, all Century 21 M&M and Associates agents and employees are on a centralized phone and voice mail system, using 4-digit dialing to reach agents or employees at any location. The ShoreTel system also gives each agent and employee a graphical interface on their computer, ShoreTel's Personal Call Manager™, which provides Microsoft Outlook integration with employee computers for directory dialing, contact screen pops, and calendar integration. ShoreWare® Personal Call Manager gives users the equivalent of a desktop PBX—a powerful, all-purpose tool for managing voice communications. With it, employees can quickly type in a name, bring up a number, and make their calls from local online directories—all with the click of a mouse, right from the desktop.

"It's important that receptionists or other employees find an agent a caller is looking for quickly," said Kaplan. "The ShoreTel directory makes it quick and easy to find any agent. If someone calls in for a property, it takes just seconds to find the listing agent and connect the caller to that agent, whether that agent's working on his or her cell, home or desk phone. ShoreTel seems to have been designed for a business like ours—it's a perfect fit for a business that requires flexibility and changes on the fly."

With ShoreTel's e-mail integration, agents and employees centrally manage their e-mail and voice mail activity. Voice mail messages are stored in the industry-standard WAV Audio for Windows format, allowing users to play them on multimedia PCs, attach them to e-mail messages or embed them in other documents. The ability of the ShoreTel system to track customer phone calls, export and distribute voice mails files, and keep a running history of calls into each number is helpful in continually monitoring and improving customer service.

ShoreTel™

"The telephone system is crucial to our business and ShoreTel has given us the flexibility to think out of the box. It's been great that we've been able to implement a new business process model and gain so many benefits so quickly."

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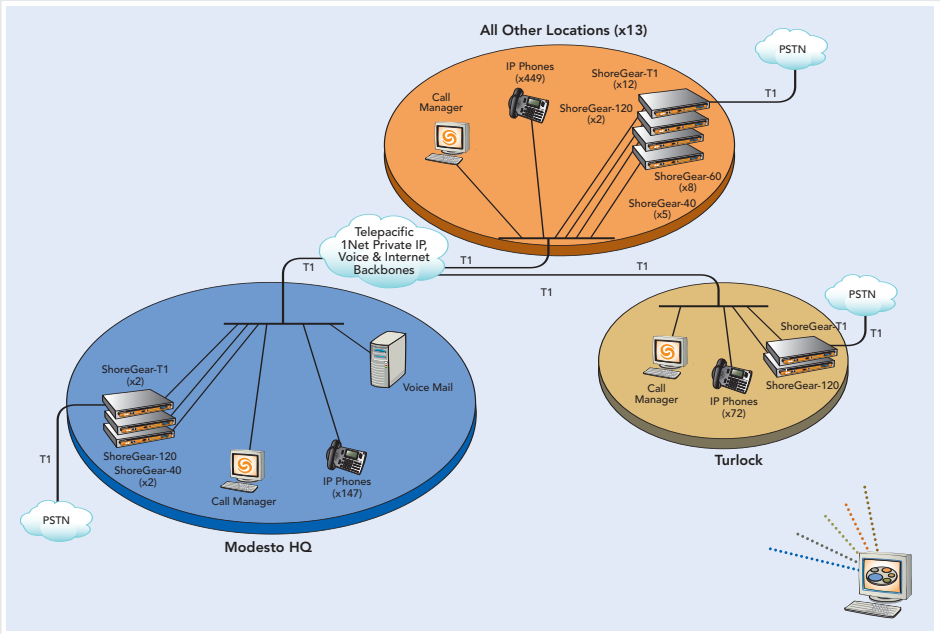
The ShoreTel system also makes it possible for Century 21 M&M and Associates management to stay in touch with all of its 700+ agents and employees. "The executive team really likes the ability to broadcast voice mail messages to all of the agents and employees—it seems to be more effective than sending out a bulk e-mail message," said Kaplan. "We use that for important information on a companywide basis, and sales managers can send out reminders to agents in their branch office. It's an effective tool for mobile employees, and real estate agents are already accustomed to checking voice mail, sometimes more than e-mail, so it's a reliable way of getting information to them."



Century 21 M&M and Associates deployed ShoreTel to 15 locations with 668 ShorePhone IP phones.

SHORETEL CAN CHANGE THE WAY YOU DO BUSINESS

"We're the only real estate company in this marketplace to have implemented this central call-handling business model," said Kaplan. "We can only do that because of the ShoreTel system. This allows customers to get to the right agent quickly and improves lead conversion to sales. This is a huge benefit when recruiting new agents, making sure agents receive calls on their own listings, and keeping talented people. We get so many positive comments from our agents. The telephone system is crucial to our business and ShoreTel has given us the flexibility to think out of the box. It's been great that we've been able to implement a new business process model and gain so many benefits so quickly."

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