Tribal Government Expects to Save $65,000 Annually with Unified

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Jon James, Chief Information Officer, Cherokee Nation

Cherokee Nation employees depend on telephone and email to communicate across a large area as they provide services for 300,000 tribal members. The tribal government decided to deploy Microsoft Lync Server 2010 to give staff the options of instant messaging, presence, and web conferencing from PCs and mobile phones. It expects to reduce costs, boost productivity, and make progress on tribal initiatives, such as resurrecting the Cherokee language.

Business Needs

With more than 300,000 citizens, the Cherokee Nation is the largest tribal nation in the United States. It oversees a variety of tribal enterprises ranging from aerospace and defense contracts to entertainment venues, contributing more than US$1.5 billion annually to the local economy. It provides housing, community services, education, tribal citizenship, leadership, commerce, and career services across a network of offices. Health services are delivered at 10 clinics and a hospital in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

When Chief Information Officer Jon James joined the Cherokee Nation 17 years ago, there were three IT staff members. Today, the Information Systems department has 70 employees. “Over the years, IT has become more of a strategic enabler, supporting the goals of the tribal government,” he says. “Right now, we are looking for additional communications technologies to help employees connect to provide better services for tribal members.”
The Cherokee Nation maintains a private-branch exchange (PBX) system from Cisco and is introducing voice over IP (VoIP) capabilities as it remodels government offices. “Employees use approximately 1,600 mobile phones and our Microsoft Exchange Server-based email service to communicate, but we have no tools for instant messaging or web conferencing in daily tribal government business,” says James. “Adding these communications capabilities would reduce phone costs and bandwidth usage. Also, we could cut back on traveling to attend meetings or provide IT support.”

The Cherokee Nation uses the Adobe Connect web conferencing solution to support a popular online Cherokee Language course; however, James wanted a more cost-effective, interoperable, and user-friendly solution to improve the online learning experience. “Through our Language Technology program, we are looking for ways to use technology to revitalize the Cherokee language,” says James.

Solution
When the Cherokee Nation acquired the Microsoft Enterprise Client Access License (CAL) suite in 2010, it used the opportunity to provide enhanced communications capabilities. The Enterprise CAL suite includes Microsoft Lync Server 2010, which consolidates the different ways that people communicate—instant messaging (IM), web conferencing, and voice—in a single client interface: Microsoft Lync 2010. Cherokee Nation employees can use Microsoft Lync communications software to connect in innovative ways, regardless of their physical location. “With Lync Server 2010, we gained a holistic communications solution that interoperates with our Microsoft Exchange Server 2010 environment and our PBX system,” says James.

The Cherokee Nation engaged Enabling Technologies—a member of the Microsoft Partner Network and Winner of the Microsoft Unified Communications Partner of the Year for 2009 and 2010—to deploy Lync Server 2010 for IM, presence, and web and audio conferencing. A single front-end server running Lync Server 2010, collocated with the Audio/Visual Conferencing and Mediation Server roles, interoperates with the Cisco UCM solution over an SIP (session initiation protocol) trunk to provide dial-in conferencing. The design includes a Lync Server 2010 Archiving and Monitoring Server, which uses a back-end server running Microsoft SQL Server 2008 R2 data management software. The Lync Server 2010 edge server provides access for remote and external users along with federation services to other organizations and public IM systems. External access to Lync web services requires an HTTPS reverse proxy server—in this case, Microsoft Forefront Threat Management Gateway 2010, which is also part of the Enterprise CAL suite.

“Enabling Technologies has a deep understanding of how to design Lync Server topologies,” says James. “They deployed the pilot environment for approximately 20 IT staff remotely. Now we’re looking at the Microsoft Office Communicator Mobile component for mobile phones that support Microsoft Exchange ActiveSync technology so employees can use the same presence, IM, and voice features on the road as they can in the office. We expect a rapid rate of adoption because the Lync 2010 client user interface is so intuitive. It’s easy to change an IM session to a live meeting with a single click.”

Benefits
By using Lync Server 2010, the Cherokee Nation will reduce costs and expects that employees will use Lync Server 2010 for rich, real-time collaboration, so they can work better together to serve tribal members, despite geographically dispersed government offices.

Increases Productivity
“Lync Server 2010 is a key communications enabler for us, so our employees can become more efficient,” says James. “When we can use IM and web conferencing from PCs and mobile phones instead of driving somewhere, it will be a huge boost to productivity. Doctors and nurses can use Lync Server for IM, chat, and conference calls to provide more coordinated patient care, for example. We are already using Lync 2010 to IM with our IT colleagues at the hospital to resolve IT issues faster.”

Reduces Costs
IT staff will be able to use Lync 2010 to share an employee’s desktop and provide remote assistance. “We can retire our unsecure remote assistance tool and save (US)$15,000 a year,” says James.

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When the IT department deploys Lync Server 2010 more widely, it anticipates that the product’s interoperability with other Microsoft technology will improve the value of the tribal government’s IT investments in support of key initiatives.

“When we replace Adobe Connect with Lync Server 2010, we’ll save $50,000 a year; that’s money we can invest in resurrecting the Cherokee language,” says James. “With the next Microsoft desktop operating system and the next version of Microsoft Office supporting a language interface pack for the Cherokee syllabary, I can see people using IM on their phones and PCs to chat in our language. That’s really exciting.”