

# Cisco Partner GET Drives Technology Deployment for World's Largest Truck Stop

Iowa 80 truck stop welcomes more than 5000 customers daily; it improves communication between sites and provides enhanced service with Cisco Unified Communications from GET.



The words “truck stop” may not conjure up the image of a technology-forward operation, yet Iowa 80, which owns and operates the world’s largest truck stop, is pushing the technology envelope in its market. When it opened in 1964, the Iowa 80 Truck stop was a typical truck stop: a small building with two diesel pumps, a lube bay, and a tiny restaurant where tired drivers could get a cup of coffee and a stack of pancakes. But as the Interstate highway system expanded, the trucking industry grew along with it, and today the Iowa 80 Truck stop bills itself as the world’s largest: it welcomes more than 5,000 customers every day and operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, offering drivers a respite from the road with every possible amenity, including a full-service restaurant and fast food court. A 30,000–square-foot Super Truck Showroom carries more than 75,000 different items, and offers catalog and online shopping as well. Fuel centers are designed to get trucks through and back on the road quickly, and drivers can get their rigs washed, weighed, serviced, and repaired at Iowa 80. The stop also offers a dental office, barber shop, private showers, and a movie theater. It even has a museum dedicated to the restoration and preservation of antique trucks and trucking artifacts.

Iowa 80 also expanded to new locations over the years, choosing key locations for three additional truck stops and thirteen truck-washing centers. But as the number of sites grew, so did the challenges.

“We were spending a lot of money on phone calls to and from our remote sites, and in communicating with our customers,” says Burke Strand, network manager for Iowa 80. “We also needed to pass information back and forth, everything from

payroll to sales data to messages, and using fax machines and regular mail to accomplish that was really inefficient.” The company’s existing Avaya PBX (private branch exchange) phone system was out of date and expensive to maintain, and updating that system would be even more expensive.

Strand was interested in unified communications because it could operate across all locations, unifying the company and getting rid of the expensive toll calls between offices and out to customers. “At the end of the day, it comes down to trusting your technology,” says Strand. “I believed that if we trusted our most critical data on the network, we should trust our phone system on that network too.”

Long a believer in the strength of Cisco® technology, Strand accepted an invitation from local Cisco Silver Certified Partner Global Enterprise Technology (GET) to attend a seminar on Cisco communications solutions, which also featured the Cisco NOW (networking on wheels) van, a 25-foot mobile demonstration van equipped with the latest Cisco communications technologies.

He also considered Avaya IP technology, but that solution included a third-party network company unfamiliar to Strand, and the cost was almost double that of a Cisco Unified Communications solution.

“With many years of networking experience behind me, there are certain names I trust, and Cisco is top of the line as far as I’m concerned,” says Strand. “I trusted the strength of Cisco technology and the expertise of GET – I knew that a converged data/voice solution with Cisco Unified Communications was the right solution for Iowa 80.”



GET, headquartered in Cherry Valley, Illinois, has found real success aligning itself with Cisco. The company originally focused on global enterprise accounts, then expanded its reach to include local small and medium sized businesses (SMB)s in the areas near its three Illinois offices. Today, Kevin Logiudice, of GET, estimates that 90 percent of the company's customers fall in the SMB category.

GET put a senior system engineer on the project, and she held extensive meetings with Strand and his team to guide the deployment and help ensure that as Iowa 80 grows, the technology to support that growth would be in place and ready. Iowa 80 had a Cisco 2611 in place, but to support company growth and a new phone system, GET deployed a more robust Cisco 3825 Integrated Services Router (ISR) and ASA5510. The unified communications portion of the solution included Cisco Unified Communications Manager, Cisco Unity, two servers, and two Survivable Remote Site Telephony (SRST) gateways for backup. Cisco Unified Contact Center Express would be deployed for Iowa 80's call centers, which handle calls from customers needing help with an online mail order, and for the truck scale support system.

To roll out the new Cisco Unified Communications phone system, Strand opted to deploy the phones at smaller remote sites first.

"Burke wanted to deploy the phone system last at the main site in Walcott [Iowa], since it is the largest site and all of the company executives are there," says Logiudice. "If there were any hiccups or issues in the deployment or operation of the new systems, he wanted to have them worked out by the final deployment at that main site." The GET team deployed the infrastructure to support the entire phone system at the Walcott site, then deployed the Cisco Unified Communications system at two truck stops in Missouri and one in North Carolina. The three truck stops got about 80 phones each. More than 200 Cisco Unified IP Phones were eventually deployed at the main Walcott site – most of them Cisco Unified IP Phones 7941, with color 7971 models going to executives.

GET also deployed an application from RSI that runs a call accounting system on the company's Windows server, an application that allows the company to gather and compile call data on the Cisco Unified Communications system and consolidate costs with one master phone bill.

To further increase the level of service that it offers to truck drivers, Iowa 80 asked GET to provide a way to offer its customers wireless access. GET deployed a Cisco wireless LAN controller WLC2106 and six Cisco wireless access points that provide Internet connectivity inside and outside the main Walcott facilities.

"Many of these drivers are on the road for weeks at a time," says Strand. "We wanted to offer free internet access from inside our facilities and also from our parking lots and other outdoor areas so that drivers can sit in their trucks and communicate with their home offices and their families." The wireless solution is working

so well that the company added more Cisco access points and Cisco wireless IP phones at its 45,000-square-foot distribution center, which handles the purchasing and distribution for all of Iowa 80's facilities.

With Iowa 80's facilities successfully up and running on a converged data/voice solution from Cisco, Strand is adding up the benefits, starting with the bottom line.

"We're saving two thousand dollars a month just on our maintenance contract for our old phone system," he says. "On top of that, we're saving at least four hundred dollars a month in long distance charges." He's having GET manage the maintenance contract for all of the new equipment, a service that Logiudice says customers find increasingly valuable.

"We have a dedicated team for contract maintenance that can let Burke know when things need to be renewed, and we put everything in a format that's easy for him to see exactly what is going on with his maintenance contracts."

– Kevin Logiudice, GET

Strand says the entire Iowa 80 organization appreciates how the new phone solution unifies the company, saying the four-digit dialing makes everyone feel like they're in the same building. The flexibility of the system allows Iowa 80's 1000 employees to relocate to different jobs or new work spaces very easily.

"With one thousand employees, offices and work locations are always changing," says Strand. "Before this solution, we usually had to bring in an Avaya person, and they would re-program the system to accommodate a move. Now, the employee simply unplugs their phone, brings it with them, and plugs it in at their new work space. It's incredibly efficient."

The Cisco Unified Contact Center Express solution is also providing increased efficiency, delivering critical historical reporting for support calls as well as features that help Iowa 80's customer service staff work through customer issues more efficiently. The customer service staff can see more complete call statistics more quickly and clearly, and the easy moves, adds, and changes afforded by Cisco Unified Communications allows the staff to easily adapt to the challenges at hand, whether that means moving to a different station or working through an issue with the technology group in a lab.

"I could not have done a successful deployment on this scale without working with a strong partner," says Strand. "GET and its strong partnership with Cisco enabled us to keep concentrating on our core business and know we were getting the best, most advanced solution that was right for us. Truck stops are not usually thought of as being technologically forward thinking, but whatever we can implement to better serve our customers, we'll do it."