

AMALGAMATED SUGAR CO. LLC

Moving to a multiple-location, single-system image.

The Background

The Amalgamated Sugar Company LLC, with roots reaching back to 1898, turns beets into sweets. As one of the nation's top sugar producers, the company processes sugar beets into sugar products marketed under the White Satin brand as well as under private-label grocery brands. Since 1997, Amalgamated Sugar has been owned by the Snake River Sugar Company, a cooperative that's comprised of sugar beet growers in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.

Six Aging Voice Systems, Four Service Providers

The company is headquartered in Boise, Idaho, and has three processing facilities in Idaho and two distribution facilities in Oregon. While all one company, the six facilities had disparate phone systems, some of which were 20 years old or more. Because each facility had a different standalone voice system, it was very difficult to manage and maintain.

Adding to the difficulty was the number of vendors involved in servicing the six systems. Black Box had serviced the corporate headquarters and one of the plants for many years. A second longtime vendor serviced two other processing facilities. The remaining two facilities were serviced by two different vendors.

A few years ago, Gene Thomas, Factory Accounting Manager at the Nampa, ID facility, and Kerry Smedley, IS Manager at the company's headquarters, decided it was time to upgrade the entire company to one system. The company was spending too much time and money trying to maintain aging equipment. "We were already utilizing current technology to connect our numerous locations, so it made sense to investigate how we might do the same thing with our voice communications," said Mr. Thomas. "Because the phone systems at five of the six locations were old and obsolete, the timing was right for us to explore how this could be accomplished."

Moving to a Multiple-Location, Single-System Image

The entire enterprise communications system was at the end of its productive life cycle and needed to be replaced, except for some select analog communications devices. The Amalgamated project team reached out to Black Box and other vendors for potential solutions, budgets, and implementation strategies. The team put together a list of must-have requirements for the new VoIP system.

"We were looking for a complete VoIP system with a proven record at a reasonable cost," said Mr. Smedley. "We felt like some of the other systems we looked at were still using older technology."

The top priorities were:

- Simplified administration and maintenance.
- Reduced expenses for MACs.
- Simplified system upgrades.

Other requirements included:

- Uniform in-house dialing.
- Enhanced system performance.
- Survivability and reliability.
- Easy expandability to new locations.
- Accommodate growth easily.
- Improve user productivity via new applications and mobility.
- Extend core features and functionality to all locations.
- Have a single source for service/troubleshooting.

Choosing the Black Box Proposal

After a very extensive RFP and review process (and on the recommendation of an independent consultant), Amalgamated Sugar chose the ShoreTel™ system proposed by Black Box. "All through the process, we worked closely with Amalgamated's team to help educate them on the different technologies available so that they did not overspend or implement something that did not meet their needs. Ultimately, it was all about the phone system and their enterprise network becoming one," said Jothan Yeager, Black Box Senior Account Manager.

Industry:
Food Manufacturing

Project:
New VoIP system

Major Challenge:
Multiple-location, single-system image
Simplified management
Simplified upgrades/growth
Single-source service

Another factor in Black Box's favor is that Black Box also has a broad geographic footprint and has an office near every Amalgamated Sugar site. As a result, all the service could be coordinated through one company, but the support would be done locally. This greatly simplifies service management.

"Timing Was Critical"

Because of the nature of Amalgamated Sugar's business, timing for the implementations was critical. They had to be coordinated around Amalgamated Sugar's "campaign." That's when the company harvests and processes the beets. Only one month after signing the contract, Black Box installed the corporate headquarters and two other locations.

"We were doing back-to-back installations," explained Josh Iverson, Black Box Senior Account Manager. "It was a pretty tight schedule with two installations in August, two in September, one in October, and one in November. It was a real challenge working around the normal day-to-day issues of beet harvest and campaign."

continued on next page



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AMALGAMATED SUGAR CO.

"The Project Went Off Perfectly"

To ensure the smooth implementation of all the sites, the same Black Box team did all the programming and management. Before the installations, the team traveled to each site to provide classroom training to the employees. The Black Box project management team also traveled to each site to oversee the installations. The actual installation was done by local Black Box technicians, with excellent assistance from Amalgamated's Mr. Thomas, Mr. Smedley, and their IT group.

The Black Box team also offered its assistance in helping Amalgamated Sugar do network assessments, upgrade some network equipment, and replace cabling as necessary. In addition to providing the ShoreTel solution, Black Box provided PoE Ethernet switches, UPS, and VoIP monitoring.

"The project went off perfectly," said Mr. Iverson. "We worked hand in hand with Amalgamated Sugar's IT staff, accounting managers, corporate administrators, and local facility managers."

"After the cutovers, Josh and I personally checked with every employee to make sure they knew how to use the new system," explained Mr. Yeager. "And, I know the Amalgamated Sugar staff really liked the security of having Black Box people on-site during the critical cutovers."

"There were no problems whatsoever," Mr. Yeager continued. "This was as perfect of an installation as you could ever hope for."

All in all, Black Box installed approximately 426 ShoreTel VoIP phones, plus 67 Avaya PoE Ethernet switches, 40 Eaton UPSs, and a PathSolutions VoIP monitoring solution for up to 5000 interfaces.

Centralized Management

The Black Box installation team trained the Amalgamated Sugar IT staff, the telecom manager, and various other key individuals in the administration and management of the system, which enables maintenance to be done from any location or at a single location.

"What could have been an extremely difficult and messy project, turned out to be a very successful implementation," said Mr. Smedley. "I'm glad we went with ShoreTel and Black Box! If we had to do it all over, I'm confident we would make the same decision."

"We developed a great relationship with the Black Box team beginning with the preparation of their thorough and complete response to our RFP, and continuing through the current support they provide. We could not have found a better team to work with us through the deployment at six different locations across Oregon and Idaho."

Gene Thomas, Factory Accounting Manager, The Amalgamated Sugar Company LLC



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