

Pace by name, Pace by nature

Taking customers to next generation of voice and unified communications

UK-based Pace Telecom's name is apt, because it is one of the telecom service providers setting the pace for the transition to SIP, creating a future-facing set of customer services that is a foundation for unified communications, value-added services and fixed mobile convergence. A key part of Pace's strategy has been the transition to Centile's ISTRA platform to host and grow its Centrex customer base, creating a robust, scalable, flexible and innovative framework on which customers can rely for years to come.

While Pace may be forward-looking, it has a long-established history and UK track record. The family-owned business - still headquartered in the idyllic countryside around Wrexham, with additional offices around the UK – moved into telecoms around 25 years ago. One of the UK's first providers of wholesale line rental in the UK, the company has a solid base of thousands of customers nationwide, ranging from individual users right up to large enterprises that need to support hundreds of employees. Many of these customers have been with Pace since the early days, others have been added as the company has grown.

Pace's market strategy is simple but effective: show customers they are valued by giving them the best service possible and always try to stay one step ahead of the market. This is why in 2015 the company decided to commit to the growing SIP market. Says Pace CEO and founder Jamie Hughes, "SIP and VOIP have been around for decades, but connectivity in the UK meant that for a long time it was not viable to support a high enough quality for customers. Then a couple of years ago, we realised that the broadband infrastructure in the UK had improved to the point when it made sense to start moving into SIP."

Moving to SIP

Jamie also cites the fact that customers are going to have to move to IP services, with OpenReach having informed the market that it will not be selling ISDN lines in a couple of years, with all legacy lines being switched off by 2025. Says Pace Telecom's National Sales Director Andrew McNulty, "It's like the big analogue TV switch off in the UK a few years ago, only more of a challenge because the implications are bigger." This is because of the number of employees within an organisation, the time needed to evaluate alternatives and to make the transition.

While ultimately there is no choice but to switch to IP-based telecoms, Pace see this evolution of the telecoms market as the gateway to give customers access to a whole range of more advanced services that deliver better location-independence, collaboration and integration with other technologies. Moreover, most of those services can be provided today.

In addition to the more obvious benefits of SIP – more flexibility, better business continuity and significant cost savings – business users can integrate with other services, such as CRM, video collaboration. Says Andrew McNulty, "Many customers are increasingly aware of modern communications technology and its benefits, such as more home or remote working and a better work-life balance."

Platform for the future

Pace Telecom initially invested in an open source hosted telephony solution, but decided that it needed something more suited to the long-term, particularly in terms of functionality and the ability to scale without any sacrifice of reliability. Research into telecom technology vendors leading the way in Europe led Pace to find Centile.

Says Jamie Hughes, "By that time we'd learnt a lot about SIP and hosted telephony and knew what we were looking for. Centile was everything we wanted: its service is reliable, it offers advanced technology, has a proven market track record and good support, which is essential to us. Centile has the perfect blend of PBX and UC services."

"We found no other company that was taking the same approach as Centile. It's also a very similar culture to ours: growing fast, but still retaining the personal touch. For instance, when there is a problem, we know that we can get an instant response from Centile's senior management."

Rapid migration

The time from signing the contract to switching over to Centile's platform took approximately six months and in fact, the service was fully live within four months. Ensuring a smooth transition from the legacy system to Centile followed some specific steps, including: Pace engineers spending time at Centile in the South of France being trained; Centile's engineers installing technology at Pace's own data centre; a period of testing; then further time at Pace's HQ to finalise training and support the customer migration process.

"It was a seamless process," says Jamie Hughes, "Customers did not know that anything had changed. It was business as usual for them." Plus, Pace can now start to offer those customers a greater range of services, such as point-of-presence, even across dispersed locations such as sub-sites, or the ability to treat a mobile handset as an office extension, even when abroad. Pace has also adopted Centile's mylstra self-service tool and has branded it as Pace Touch, which enables enterprise end users to manage their unified communications settings in one click from their mobile or desktop.

Concludes Jamie Hughes, "The way that people use telephony is changing, service providers like us need to embrace that and help customers. We believe that Pace Telecom is ahead of most of its UK competitors and Centile is helping us to achieve our aim to be one of the leaders in IP communications, giving customers reliable, cost-effective, advanced and flexible services."

Centile services to Pace Telecom:

- Unified Communications Platform
- Telephony Services
- Unified Messaging
- Systematic Call Recording
- PBX Trunking
- Yealink handsets