

Ask Jeeves Improves Communication Channels with New Unified Messaging Solution Powered by Microsoft

Published: October 2003

Leading Internet search engine Ask Jeeves UK (www.ask.co.uk) has recently implemented Kinesis from Active Voice, a next generation unified communications solution based on Microsoft Exchange. As a result, employees are able to conveniently access and respond to their voice, fax and e-mail messages from their Microsoft Outlook inboxes, touch-tone telephone or the Internet. Active Voice's Kinesis system has proven to be a stable and reliable solution for Ask Jeeves. It has also reduced the administrative burden on the Ask Jeeves IT team, which previously had to spend time maintaining their previous voice mail system. With Kinesis, the need for ongoing system maintenance has been eliminated.

Situation

In all areas of business, success depends on good communication with customers and partners. Employees also need access to technologies that enable them to work with their colleagues effectively. Until recently, leading Internet search engine Ask Jeeves was experiencing problems with its voicemail system. Lost messages and ongoing system maintenance compromised the company's ability to respond to customers and clients swiftly.

Launched in February 2000, Ask Jeeves UK has become a leading Web site in the United Kingdom. Ask.co.uk provides Internet users with a fast, resourceful search experience through a combination of Teoma powered search technology, hand edited and selected results using human Editors providing targeted search results quickly and easily. The company, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Ask Jeeves, Inc. (Nasdaq: ASKJ), launched the first of its advertiser-supported sites in April 1997 and the UK site in 2000.

Until early 2003, Ask Jeeves was using a unified messaging solution that could no longer handle its rapidly growing voicemail traffic and number of users. Darren Braithwaite, Network Manager, Ask Jeeves, says: "We were having a number of problems with our old system. Callers would often sit through a number of voice prompts, but not be given the option to leave a voicemail. At other times, voicemails failed to appear in employees' inboxes. This was a source of great frustration for everyone concerned."

"Because our previous voicemail system was having difficulty coping with the high volume of voicemail traffic, our IT team had to spend many hours re-booting the voicemail server every few weeks. This was very inefficient and frustrating."

Solution Overview

Customer Profile

Launched in February 2000, Ask Jeeves UK has become a leading Web site in the United Kingdom. Ask.co.uk provides Internet users with a fast, resourceful search experience through a combination of Teoma powered search technology, hand edited and selected results using human Editors providing targeted search results quickly and easily. Ask Jeeves UK is a wholly owned subsidiary of Ask Jeeves Inc.

Business Situation

Ask Jeeves needed a new unified messaging solution to manage voice messages left by both customers and consumers. The company's previous system could no longer cope with increasing message traffic. As a result, messages were often lost, compromising the company's ability to respond to customers and clients swiftly.

Solution

Kinesis, a next generation unified communications solution from Active Voice, was implemented to help Ask Jeeves employees access and manage their messages quickly and efficiently from their PC, telephone or Internet.

Benefits

- Seamless integration with existing infrastructure
- Excellent performance
- Stable and reliable
- Significant time savings
- Cost-effective solution
- Enhanced corporate image

Software and Services

Active Voice Kinesis v2.6
Microsoft Exchange Server 5.5
Microsoft MSDE

Partners

Active Voice, LLC

Solution

To guarantee the reliability of its voicemail service and ensure the best possible communication between partners and colleagues, Ask Jeeves decided to implement Kinesis, a next generation unified communications solution from Active Voice. In April 2003, employees from Ask Jeeves and Active Voice successfully installed an 8-port Kinesis system to serve Ask Jeeves' 71 employees.

Braithwaite says: "The process of implementing the Kinesis solution was fast and painless. The team we had assembled on site was able to install the software in a single day. After that, employees could access their voicemails right away, ensuring we had no disruption to our business."

The Kinesis product, which is based on Microsoft Exchange and Windows 2000, is a unified communications server that enables users to access and manage their voice, fax, and e-mail messages from the PC, telephone or Internet. Kinesis is specifically designed to manage high volumes of telephone traffic, both internally and across company boundaries, by integrating the telephone system with Exchange and Microsoft Outlook.

Calls from outside the company are passed through an automated assistant. When the requested staff members are unavailable, calls are routed to an MSDE database, which stores a voice prompt from each employee. Callers can then leave voice messages that appear in users' e-mail inboxes.

Kinesis uses forms that are installed on each client PC from a central server. This enables voicemails to appear in users' inboxes with a distinctive icon. A toolbar on the inbox can then be used to play, rewind or fast forward messages without having to double-click on the file and open a media player. When Ask Jeeves employees receive these voicemail notifications, they can easily respond by e-mail or telephone. If the messages are forwarded to contacts outside the company, the voice message appears as a Wave file (WAV) attachment.

Braithwaite says: "As well as ensuring that every voicemail is captured reliably, Kinesis also makes it much easier to employees to check and respond to messages. In fact, I've had a lot of great feedback from new users. They are typically very impressed by the time savings Kinesis offers."

Benefits

Seamless Integration, Excellent Performance

The Kinesis solution leverages Microsoft technologies that enable e-mail, voice and other data to be shared through a single, centrally managed application. These applications are fully compatible with enterprise-based administration and management tools.

Braithwaite says: "Kinesis runs smoothly alongside our existing infrastructure. Because it integrates seamlessly with Exchange, Outlook and our database, it performs 20-30 per cent better than our old system."

Stable and Reliable 24-Hours-a-Day

The Microsoft-powered Kinesis system has been stable and reliable for Ask Jeeves and its employees ever since it was installed several months ago.

Ask Jeeves prides itself on the ability to be in close contact with customers and consumers. Active Voice's Kinesis solution ensures that no voicemail is ever lost or mis-routed, significantly improving the responsiveness of our organisation. This reliability ensures we can meet the expectations of our business partners – both today and tomorrow."

Darren Braithwaite
Network Manager
Ask Jeeves

Braithwaite says: "There has been no downtime on the voicemail server since the implementation in April 2003. We no longer have to worry about whether the system is working properly. Before Kinesis was installed, we had about 12 calls per day being rerouted to administrators. Now, we can be certain that voicemails are reaching the correct people and helping them to communicate efficiently.

Significant Time Savings

Prior to the Kinesis implementation, the Ask Jeeves IT team spent valuable time maintaining its old voicemail system. The voicemail server had to be frequently re-booted, wasting the company's time and resources.

Braithwaite says: "Personally, I am saving at least an hour every week. My team now has more time to concentrate on core tasks associated with the smooth running of our IT infrastructure."

A Cost-Effective Solution

To ensure that the Kinesis solution is as cost-effective as possible, Microsoft has developed a special edition of Exchange and Microsoft Windows 2000 software for Active Voice. This includes a Voicemail Runtime Edition that does not require clients that already use Exchange for their e-mail systems to buy additional licenses.

Jeroen Franken, Director of Sales and Marketing for Active Voice B.V. in the Netherlands, says: "Our close and strategic relationship with Microsoft enabled us to offer Kinesis to Ask Jeeves at a very affordable price. In a competitive market, our ability to deliver cost-effective messaging solutions to our customers is critical."

Enhanced Corporate Image

Before the Kinesis system was implemented, Ask Jeeves employees were sometimes unable to react quickly to queries from advertisers and trading partners due to lost messages or ongoing system maintenance.

Braithwaite says: "Ask Jeeves prides itself on the ability to be in close contact with customers and consumers. The Kinesis solution ensures that no voicemail is ever lost or mis-routed, significantly improving the responsiveness of our organisation. This reliability ensures we can meet the expectations of our business partners, both today and tomorrow."

Future Plans

Ask Jeeves plans to add SMS (Short Message Service) to its Kinesis system when the company upgrades from Microsoft Exchange Server 5.5 to Exchange 2000. This will allow Ask Jeeves employees to receive notification of messages, including how many new messages are waiting, what type of messages they have, and whether any are urgent.

Braithwaite says: "We now have a system in place that we can build on in the future to ensure the best possible communications with our business partners. We are planning to add new functionality such as the SMS alerts in the near future and we can plug in additional ports quickly and easily as our business grows. Above all, the Kinesis solution is helping us all to work more efficiently and will enable us to maintain our excellent communication with customers and consumers."

Microsoft Windows 2000 Server is the multipurpose network operating system for businesses of all sizes. One of the latest versions of the best-selling server operating system, Windows 2000 Server lets you:

- Share files and printers reliably and securely.
- Choose from thousands of business applications compatible to run today on Windows 2000 Server.
- Build Web applications and connect to the Internet.

This combination and flexibility deliver a strong business value proposition for today's IT customer.

For more information about the Windows 2000 Server family, please visit:
<http://www.microsoft.com/windows2000/server/>

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products or services, call the Microsoft UK Contact Centre on 08706 010100. To access information via the World Wide Web, go to:

<http://www.microsoft.com/uk>

For more information about Active Voice products and services, please visit the corporate Web site at:
<http://www.activevoice.com/> or the European site at <http://www.activevoice.nl>

For more information about Ask Jeeves, please call Claire Tordoff, PR Manager on 020 7421 1651 or visit the Web site at:

<http://www.askjeeves.co.uk>

Top facts about Ask Jeeves UK

1. Ask Jeeves enjoys the second highest online brand awareness after AOL, according to independent research by RSL Capibus, June 2003. *
2. Over 5 million unique visitors visited www.ask.co.uk in August 2003.
3. 1 in 4 of all web users in the UK are reached by Ask Jeeves.
4. 33 million searches were performed on Ask Jeeves UK in July 2003.
5. Ask Jeeves uses a combination of Teoma powered search technology; hand edited and selected questions using human Editors providing targeted results to online searches.
6. Ask Jeeves is the seventh most popular digital brand, according to Revolution magazine and NOP World Sept 2003.

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