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TECH SAVVY

Streamlining and Securing Operations with Today's Technology

By :: Charlotte Woolard | Photos by :: Dave Miyamoto



Nathan Okinaka of So Ono Food Products can rest assured knowing that fielding calls is no longer a problem with his office's updated phone system from Wavecom Solutions.

Once upon a time (a year ago) ready-to-eat produce wholesaler So Ono Food Products handled millions of dollars in revenue with only one telephone number and four telephone lines. A call to the office cycled through the lines until either the system kicked the caller to the general voice mailbox or someone answered the phone.

At that point the appropriate person would be alerted to the call via a highly specialized office intercom: "We yelled," says Nathan Okinaka, director of operations at the Honolulu-based company. "It was an ancient system. We had cables running all over the office. We used our cell phones for long calls to try to keep the lines open."

The company has grown rapidly since it started. Okinaka knew he

needed to upgrade communications, but he didn't want to purchase a new phone system, which required an upfront capital investment without offering assurance that it could evolve with the company's needs.

It's a challenge many businesses face. New technology needs to be affordable. It needs to increase efficiency and address current pain points. And, especially for growing businesses, technologies must be adaptable.

Pacific Edge Magazine asked technology experts to talk about the issues driving key technology investments today. We got a crash course in virtual tunnels, the superiority of the pixel and the Web-based services that finally gave Okinaka a phone system that does not require employees to shout across the office.



Using state-of-the-art technology, Ina Chang, president of Aloha Data Services, is happy to help businesses transform their stacks of paper files into well-organized digital databases.

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UPDATING COMMUNICATIONS

So Ono signed onto a subscription-based communications system that modernized its operations through shared, off-site infrastructure. So Ono doesn't own or maintain its phones, and it hasn't committed to a set array of features. Its options, simply put, are open.

The company leases an office phone system that sports an intercom feature. An automated operator directs incoming calls, key employees have personal phone numbers and individualized message queues speed the return of customer calls.

"It's a lot more professional," Okinaka says. "It cost us a little more than the old system, but streamlining

operations was worth it. We needed to move into something that would enable us to grow."

Web-based services that give companies access to shared resources have allowed many to access cutting-edge technology while avoiding large capital investments, says Simon Fiddian, chief technology officer at Wavecom Solutions. The Hawai'i telecommunications company (formerly known as Pacific Lightnet) set up So Ono's current system. "Price points go down, and limitations go away," he says. "It gives you the option to adopt world-class operations on a monthly basis."

Customers can scale this kind of service to match their needs, adding ➡

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The capability to work anywhere at anytime provides flexibility and increases productivity. Justin Goo, president of Opihi Net, specializes in helping small businesses go mobile.

and deleting features with the ebb and flow of business. As their operation evolves, so can their subscription.

DIGITIZING THE OFFICE

Businesses no longer need to store customer forms that have been filled out by hand, and paper records of all sizes can be converted to digital documents and crunched data.

"Going digital is inevitable," says Ina Chang, president of Aloha Data Services, a company that specializes in turning unwieldy paper files into organized digital databases. "It only makes sense to make everything paperless."

Most companies that opt to digitize their files take a look at reams of paper in storage, however well-organized, and hire an outside company to take on the task of plucking out staples and jogging mismatched paper sizes into a scanner-ready pile.

Data solutions companies like Aloha handle such a high volume of paper that they have invested in top-of-the-line tools to expedite the transition—everything from staple

detectors to high-speed scanners and text readers that can pull typed information from a form and enter it into a database field.

Once data has been gleaned from the pages, original documents can be shredded, reducing storage costs. Custom software can then transform that raw data into relevant information, allowing businesses to create reports and spot trends.

SPEED AND MOBILITY

The advent of mobile technology means business leaders spend less time behind their desks.

"If I'm in my office, it means I'm not doing billable work," says Justin Goo, president of information technology firm Opihi Net, which helps businesses develop mobility.

Goo spends most of his time in his clients' offices, where he has secure access to his own server using a virtual tunnel, an encrypted connection that penetrates the firewall around his own servers—technology that he expects to allow the number of people

constantly on the move to increase.

"This is the way things are going," he says, pointing also to fourth generation wireless devices released earlier this year that have accelerated download speeds for people working from laptops and Smartphones. "We're up to the same speed as entry-level DSL. Now I can actually do work."

A secure laptop computer equipped with a card for high-speed wireless Internet service provides only part of the mobile solution, he says. A central server, either kept in-house or available through a Web-based service provider like Google, needs to provide a place for collaborating or backing up files on the go. And mobile devices need to be able to make a secure connection to that resource.

NETWORK & DATA SECURITY 101

Many small business owners make the mistake of bringing software designed for personal use into the office.

"When you're in a business-class

environment, you need the business-class stuff," says Goo, who specializes in setting up secure computer networks.

That means springing for out-of-the-box enterprise software or developing a custom solution to match your company's specific needs.

Security features should incorporate a firewall as well as the most up-to-date protections against viruses, malware and spyware. Business owners also should evaluate the sensitivity of their data when deciding whether or not to back files up to an in-house or a Web-based server, Goo says.

Companies that hold personal data like credit card and Social Security numbers should take additional precautions. They may want to quarantine sensitive databases from the Internet, and they also should review the growing number of security regulations to make sure their system meets their industry's requirements.

Those regulations are expanding

as lawmakers take steps to protect consumers from identity theft. Even companies in industries without current regulations should review their operations for security risks.

And security solutions do not always have to be technical, says Ben Schorr, CEO of Honolulu-based IT management and support firm Roland Schorr & Tower. Common-sense management of data can be just as powerful.

"It's important not just to think about what data you want to collect, but also what numbers you don't want to collect," Schorr says.

As an example, he points to a recent breach at the University of Hawai'i that potentially exposed the social security numbers of people who had used the school's parking lot.

"The university should have recognized that it didn't need [the sensitive] data and purged that," he says. The university has changed its policy and now omits the unnecessary information.

BUSINESS MUST GO ON.

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