PortaSwitch integrated with Microsoft Teams:

a flexible and cost-saving solution combining the best of both platforms

By pairing the powerful connectivity tools of Microsoft Teams with the flexible IP PBX functions of PortaSwitch, Dutch telco A1 is filling the intense demand for remote office solutions – while saving its customers money.
A1’s challenge with Microsoft Teams

COVID-19 has created high demand for remote office functionality, so it’s no surprise that Microsoft Teams has more than doubled its users since the start of the pandemic: from 32 million in March 2020 to 75 million at the beginning of May. This extreme popularity has boosted VoIP providers as well, since they are the ones who turn Microsoft Teams from a collaboration tool into a fully functioning PBX. Integration of Microsoft Teams with a VoIP service gives users a secure, comprehensive solution that lets them handle internal and external calls, create call queues, use voicemail – all using the Microsoft Teams client on their mobile devices or desktop.

But the system has downsides. First, it’s costly: to use Microsoft Teams as a PBX, a company has to purchase an E1, E3, or E5 license that can cost up to EUR30 per month, per user. Second, the IP PBX functionality of Microsoft Teams is not as broad as what a regular PBX provider can offer: for example, it lacks call analytics, back-up options, or the ability to create hunt groups. Finally, the IP PBX functionality is not flexible: you can’t have any extra features or choose providers for international calling. PortaSwitch, on the other hand, has an unlimited license with no additional fees per subscriber, and it provides many more IP PBX features. So A1 decided to combine the best of two platforms: the collaboration tools of Microsoft Teams, and the IP PBX functionality of PortaSwitch.

Company profile

- Started operations in 1994
- Was among the first to provide VoIP services in the Netherlands
- VoIP services are powered by PortaSwitch

Business goals

- Prevent the loss of customers that were looking elsewhere for collaboration functionality
- Provide integration of Microsoft Teams with VoIP service
- Promote its own services rather than resell Microsoft Teams
“About one-quarter of our clients were asking if we can provide integration of Microsoft Teams with a VoIP service. Yet only 10% of those who’ve requested an integration go for it because using Microsoft Teams as a phone system is expensive. So people would like to have some sort of mix-and-match solution where they get the best from PBX and the connectivity tools from Microsoft Teams. And we made the solution for them.”

- Harry Dijkstra, CEO, A1

The mix-and-match solution

A1 can now enable its customers to put some employees on a Microsoft phone system and keep others on a regular VoIP system. With the PortaSwitch functionality, the two groups can be easily connected, and the client only needs to buy a Microsoft license for employees who must use the Microsoft phone system – resulting in significant cost savings.

Here’s how it works. Every employee is given an SIP account in PortaSwitch, with an SBC from AudioCodes working as a gateway to Microsoft Teams. Inbound calls ring on both the Microsoft Teams client and SIP phone. Meanwhile, employees in the unlicensed group use the SIP phone for outgoing calls, while the licensed users can choose between the SIP phone system and the Microsoft Teams client. (In a typical system, licensed employees would only be able to use the Microsoft Teams client; the ability to offer them the additional option of a regular SIP phone is yet another advantage of the mix-and-match solution.)

“We changed the routing: all the calls are coming into the PortaSwitch-based IP PBX, and if a call is made internally or externally to a Microsoft Teams account, then only this traffic is routed to Microsoft. It’s a very convenient and flexible solution because the PBX functionality from Microsoft is in no way as complete as what we can get from PortaOne.”

- Harry Dijkstra, CEO, A1
The results for A1

Before it adopted this best-of-both-worlds solution, A1 had been losing customers who felt forced to take on the steep cost of full Microsoft Teams licensing to gain the collaboration tools they wanted. Now, A1 is retaining those clients – and winning new ones – because they are finally able to offer all of the power of a Microsoft Teams phone system, with the bonus of added flexibility, cost savings, and easy-to-explain benefits.

For A1, the mix-and-match solution is not just another source of revenue: it is a way to survive in a highly competitive market. "If we didn't offer a flexible MS Teams integration solution, we'd lose a part of our customer base," says Harry Dijkstra. Now, they can even leverage this new solution to promote A1’s own services. "We don't want to be just a Microsoft Teams reseller," he explains.

A1 was able to set up this solution in less than three months – it was ready by mid-March 2020, right at the start of the pan-European lockdown. When COVID-19 hit and offices needed to set up remote-work solutions, the benefits of what A1 could offer became even clearer. By the end of May, A1’s flexible Microsoft Teams solution was already bringing in revenue – and the product had barely been launched.

About PortaOne:

PortaOne has been developing billing, business support systems, and cloud telephony software for communication service providers for over two decades. We've helped over 480 forward-thinking telcos in 90 countries be market leaders while keeping the total cost of ownership for their business support system under control. We offer an unlimited lifetime license, and our open-architecture platform lets our customers quickly develop new services in-house. We give access to the source code to our customers to ensure security validation and transparency.

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