Two years ago Pioneer State Mutual Insurance Company literally outgrew their physical building and their phone system. With a 15,000-square-foot addition to their facility well underway, the CIO turned a critical eye to the 14-year-old phone system. Based on antiquated technology, there was no hope of it scaling to meet today’s — let alone next year’s — needs. It was time to invest in a modern phone system that would deliver on all of Pioneer’s business communications requirements.

"An impressive business needs impressive communications." Pioneer is a household brand in Michigan. In 2008 they’ll celebrate 100 years of serving Michigan. Nearing ten solid decades in the insurance business is a huge accomplishment, but serving customers using two-decades-old phone technology was holding their business back.

"For 14 years our phone system served us very well," explains Tony Paris, chief information officer at Pioneer. "The problem was that it was based on almost 20-year-old technology. The company was growing, but the system wasn’t scaling." After consulting with the IT staff and management team, Tony decided to make a forklift upgrade — in other words, to remove the existing phone system and network entirely and buy a totally new communications solution. It was clear to Tony that his challenges were not unique to the insurance industry; so Tony and his team decided to get educated on Unified Messaging and Unified Communications and research which solutions were being used successfully in insurance and other industries.

"The battle came down to Cisco plus their Unified Messaging, and Avaya plus CallAttendant Office from Objectworld to deliver Unified Messaging and Unified Communications," explains Daniel. And historically, Pioneer was an all-Cisco shop. "We showed Tony and his team the simplicity of the CallAttendant Office desktop client with a personalized auto-attendant and unified e-mail, voice mail and fax messaging. The interface was easy to use, installation and management was simple, and integration with Microsoft Exchange operated seamlessly."

"We’re really glad we decided to step up and be wowed by unfamiliar technology," asserts Tony. "At the time, we didn’t really understand all the benefits of Unified Messaging — we really liked what we were
seeing, but we didn’t have anything to compare it to.” The more they looked at the Avaya and Objectworld CallAttendant Office offering, the more they liked it. “CallAttendant Office was a big plus in the decision to buy a PBX from Avaya. It was priced right and we could see the value.

State-of-the-art Unified Messaging and Unified Communications. Over a two-month period, Pioneer and Teoma Systems did an overhaul. “It was a complete rip-and-replace,” recalls Tony. “We pulled new cable at every location. Teoma Systems installed brand new switches and handsets, as well as CallAttendant Office. The cutover was seamless. We didn’t lose any productivity on the go-live day. Teoma did a fabulous job!”

Employees of Pioneer have been using CallAttendant Office for just over two years now. Using the product’s intuitive Unified Communications tools, employees are able to determine and control the flow of calls to their extension. Designed for non-technical users, employees are able to quickly create and update their call scripts and messages based on caller ID, time of day, Microsoft Outlook contacts or contact groups.

Unified Messaging proves its worth. The tool that really resonates with employees is CallAttendant Office’s Unified Messaging. Employees have access to all their voice mail and fax messages right in their Microsoft Exchange® inbox. Employees manage all their communication and message types from the device of their choice. Most of them listen to voice mail on a softphone while at their desks, but they could use their handsets if necessary and do use cell phones when they’re mobile. They can even play e-mail messages over the phone using CallAttendant Office’s text-to-speech (TTS) capabilities. As a result, employees can work effectively and efficiently from anywhere.

“I don’t know anyone in the building who actually uses his or her handset to check voice mail,” says Tony. “To tell you the truth, I’m not sure that I even remember the number to dial voice mail anymore!” Tony believes that employees gradually stopped using handsets because CallAttendant Office’s Unified Messaging is so simple, intuitive and convenient. “People live in their e-mail,” explains Tony, “So, what good is a flashing light on a handset? CallAttendant Office has been easy for our IT staff to deploy and maintain on-site. It’s easy to train employees. And once people use it, they don’t want to go back to what they were using before,” he adds.

Connecting with the customer on their terms. This year, to better serve their customers, Pioneer spread out geographically within Michigan. The 25 remote employees are all using Personal Auto-Attendant and Unified Messaging installed by Teoma Systems. “The remote workers swear by CallAttendant Office,” says Daniel. “They’re a hundred miles away but look and feel like they’re just down the hall at head office.”

Good customer service and what it means to a business’ bottom line is sometimes hard to quantify, but customers know when they experience it. Unified Messaging is visual. Employees can see who’s sending them a fax, who’s sending them an e-mail and who has left them a voice mail. This gives employees the information they need to make intelligent decisions and prioritize their responses.

“The fact is our decision to invest in CallAttendant Office was purely based on our need for a productivity enhancement tool,” says Tony. “When we saw CallAttendant Office demonstrated, well, we just got it and had no doubt that we’d see productivity gains. And really, the incremental cost was marginal when taken in view of the full system upgrade. We haven’t been disappointed in our decision.”

CallAttendant Office is a keeper. “The support from Teoma and Objectworld has been outstanding. Quite frankly, we’ve had so few problems we haven’t had to make many calls,” explains Tony. “Objectworld stands behind the product. And I think it’s an easy product to stand behind because it is a good product. Being the CIO of a company, you hear all the sore points about your applications. When I’m paying the bills that’s when I judge products. I have some products in here that absolutely delight people. I also have some that are not quite so well received. In general, we have really good applications; however, when it comes to Objectworld, that’s one I know delights people,” confides Tony. “You want the bottom line on CallAttendant Office? If I took it away from the employees right this minute, my phone would be ringing off the hook.”

Better customer service and greater productivity with lower costs.

- Pioneer’s 150 employees have increased their productivity by using CallAttendant Office’s Unified Messaging to manage their voice, fax and e-mail messages on the devices of their choice.

- Customers listening to employees’ auto-attendant greetings, receive a positive and professional impression of Pioneer.

- Pioneer has cut costs by fulfilling their fax and voice mail needs with CallAttendant Office, while relying on internal IT staff to administer the system, eliminating the need for externally-sourced support and maintenance.

Learn more about how Objectworld products can help your business today. Visit our Web site at www.objectworld.com or call us at (888) 398-9698.