

# Case Study



## AMIDEAST

### Improving global workgroup collaboration with OpenScape

Effective communication on a global scale is critical to America-Mideast Educational and Training Services Inc. (AMIDEAST), a private, nonprofit organization that works to establish mutual understanding and cooperation between Americans and people of the Middle East and North Africa. Each year, the organization provides English language skills training, educational advising, and testing services to hundreds of thousands of students and professionals in the Middle East and North Africa. The group operates a network of field offices scattered among a dozen countries. Managers and staff in those offices and the Washington headquarters frequently need to be in touch with each other.

#### The task

Many of AMIDEAST's facilities and employees are located overseas, so that the organization has had to cope with heavy long-distance calling expenses. To provide services to customers and conduct other operations, employees in the U.S. frequently need to communicate with counterparts in other countries. Managers and staff spend many hours on audio and Web conferences every month to collaborate on training projects and discuss issues related to their Web-based training model.

But the high cost of international calling had become a burden to the organization. The problem of high long-distance costs was especially apparent when AMIDEAST employees made calls from hotels in other countries. AMIDEAST needed to find a cost effective way to keep its employees connected.

#### The solution

- OpenScape in connection with Microsoft's Live Communication Server
- Voice over IP (VoIP) networking
- optiPoint 410 IP telephones
- optiClient 130 softclient
- HiPath Xpressions

#### The benefits

- Easy set up and conduction of audio and Web conferences among offices in Washington, the Middle East and North Africa.
- Collaboration is much more effective and users have easier access to meeting documents
- Avoiding service provider conferencing costs by routing via the existing IP/PBX infrastructure
- Reduced costs for overseas travel
- Eliminating the risk of security breaches
- Increasing productivity by checking and deleting voicemail and e-mail messages more efficiently from anywhere

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## **AMIDEAST improves global workgroup collaboration, cuts travel-related communications costs, with OpenScape**

Effective communication on a global scale is critical to America-Mideast Educational and Training Services Inc. (AMIDEAST), a private, nonprofit organization that works to establish mutual understanding and cooperation between Americans and people of the Middle East and North Africa.

Each year, the Washington, D.C.-based organization provides English language skills training, educational advising, and testing services to hundreds of thousands of students and professionals in the Middle East and North Africa. AMIDEAST also supports many institutional development projects in those regions and administers educational exchange programs.

The group operates a network of field offices scattered among a dozen countries. Managers and staff in those offices and the Washington headquarters frequently need to be in touch with each other.

### **Provide efficient communications and collaboration tools among geographically dispersed facilities and employees while keeping costs down**

Many of AMIDEAST's facilities and employees are located overseas. As a result, the organization has had to cope with heavy long-distance calling expenses. To provide services to customers and conduct other operations, employees in the U.S. frequently need to communicate with counterparts in other countries. Managers and staff spend many hours on audio and Web conferences every month to collaborate on training projects and discuss issues related to their Web-based training model.

But the high cost of international calling had become a burden to the organization. "Most of the time people avoided making international calls entirely because of the cost," says Ugur Usumi, Director of IT at AMIDEAST. "When people did try to call each other, because of the time zone differences they often wasted time and money in failed attempts to contact team members overseas when they were not available."

Obstacles related to time-zone differences are especially challenging for AMIDEAST because many of its field offices are in countries that begin weekends on Thursdays and Fridays. Consequently, Saturdays and Sundays are work days in those countries, but not so for U.S.-based staff.

The problem of high long-distance costs was especially apparent when AMIDEAST employees made calls from hotels in other countries. Typically, these calls cost a minimum of \$4 to \$5 per minute and in some cases as much as \$9 per minute, Usumi says. AMIDEAST needed to find a cost-effective way to keep its employees connected.

### **OpenScape delivers presence-based conferencing and collaboration tool that helps users easily determine the most effective way to reach colleagues**

The group explored solutions from a variety of vendors, and selected OpenScape from Siemens, a presence-aware, real-time communications software suite. With OpenScape's single presence-powered view of all users and the devices available to reach them, users know instantly the best way to reach a colleague in real-time.

AMIDEAST had been using Siemens communications systems with success for more than 10 years, Usumi says, and that was one of the factors in the decision to deploy OpenScape. Another was the fact that OpenScape adds value to Microsoft's Live Communication Server, which AMIDEAST had recently installed.

AMIDEAST first began using OpenScape in its IT department, with about 10 staff members trying out the system to get a sense of its capabilities. The organization expanded the rollout to users in other departments, including staffers in field offices in the Middle East.

Usumi says the plan is to have about 100 employees, including field operations directors, new business development managers, country directors and others using the system by the end of this year. Siemens has provided training for the new system.

The implementation of OpenScape is part of an overall upgrade in AMIDEAST's telecommunications system that also includes a move to voice over IP (VoIP) networking. The remote country managers have optiPoint 410 IP telephones and mobile workers will be using the Siemens soft-client, the optiClient 130 which allows for easy access to telephony features from the workers PC. VoIP devices are already in place in most of the field offices, and the use of VoIP will help the organization significantly cut down on calling costs, Usumi says.

**"This ability to communicate more easily has increased our efficiency and enabled us to exchange information and make decisions more quickly. Our teams work better as a result."**

**Ugur Usumi**  
Director of IT  
AMIDEAST



The upgrades represent a significant change in AMIDEAST's communications, and Usumi was initially concerned about how some employees might adapt to OpenScape and its presence-aware features. But he says the changeover has gone smoothly. The system has been well received by employees, who view the technology as a better way to communicate successfully and more frequently with managers and co-workers.

AMIDEAST is also using the latest version of Siemens' unified messaging product, HiPath Xpressions, in its Washington office. The system offers a single view of all email, voice messages and faxes in one speech-enabled inbox, a telephony-accessible rulesbased filtering folder for easy text-to-speech phone retrieval sessions and extensive multilingual support.

These messaging features, coupled with OpenScape's real-time model, give mobile users around the world the best of both real-time presence awareness and unified messaging for those times when real-time contact isn't practical. HiPath Xpressions supports Microsoft Exchange, Lotus Domino, Novell Groupwise (Groupware) and other IMAP 4/POP3 email environments.

### **Upgrade communications environment improves collaboration while reducing costs, and boosts team productivity worldwide**

With OpenScape, AMIDEAST can now more easily set up and conduct audio and Web conferences among its offices in Washington, the Middle East and North Africa.

Collaboration is much more effective and users have easier access to meeting documents, an important feature for all the training sessions that AMIDEAST holds for students. AMIDEAST is able to avoid service provider conferencing costs, since all conferences are routed via the existing IP/PBX infrastructure.

Because AMIDEAST can now more efficiently conduct scheduled and ad hoc audio conferences and Web-based collaboration, it will rely much less on costly overseas travel for meetings.

AMIDEAST has also eliminated the risk of security breaches now that it's using managed, enterprise-based instant messaging with Microsoft Live Communication Server. The organization has increased the value of its Live Communication Server investment by adding OpenScape to the server and extending presence-based communications to voice, video, instant messaging and e-mail.

The presence-aware view of users and devices enabled by OpenScape allows employees to have immediate access to global team members. Employees no longer waste time and money playing "phone tag" via long-distance calls, Usumi says.

"It's easier to get hold of each other because of features like 'preferred device,'" says Usumi. "No matter where someone is, if you're trying to reach him you just click on the person's name and it will find him on the preferred device. You don't have to remember seven or eight phone numbers and are accessible when you are traveling."

Most hotels where AMIDEAST workers stay have wireless access and high-speed Internet service, so people on the road can set up their preferred device – whether it's a phone or a laptop and be reached when they're needed.

Recently an AMIDEAST worker in Cairo was having a technical problem and needed help on a Sunday (a work day in Egypt). Using OpenScape, the employee was able to quickly make contact with a systems engineer who was visiting a relative in New Jersey for the weekend. The engineer had programmed the preferred device setting to his relative's phone, so was able to get the call and help his co-worker during his work day in Egypt.

Without the concern of high long-distance costs, "people are now more likely to make calls when they need to," Usumi says. "This ability to communicate more easily has increased our efficiency and enabled us to exchange information and make decisions more quickly. Our teams work better as a result."

With HiPath Xpressions, AMIDEAST employees in the Washington office can check and delete voicemail and e-mail messages more efficiently from anywhere, and Usumi says this has also led to increased productivity.

In addition to realizing the value of improved collaboration to serve its student clients, AMIDEAST is already saving at least \$1,000 each month on international calls because of its updated communications system. Usumi says the organization plans to upgrade to the newest release of OpenScape when it becomes available.

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