

Microsoft Lync Server 2013 Multitenant Hosting Pack Customer Solution Case Study



NextUC Hosted Lync Solution sales are driven by their “try before you buy” program and self-provisioning



“Using our self-provisioning process, our customers can set up our hosted Lync service with an integrated phone for their entire organization within 10 minutes.”

Bob Barnes, VP Business Development, ConnectSolutions

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Unified Communications
Hosting Provider

Customer Profile

ConnectSolutions is a leading managed-cloud provider of unified communications solutions for small business, enterprise, and government.

Business Situation

Focusing on smaller customers through partner channels created a support challenge in managing large numbers of non-technical potential customers.

Solution

Created a simple self-provisioned “try before you buy” program that converts prospects into paying customers.

Benefits

- Simplified self-provisioning makes growth manageable.
- The “try before you buy” program provides predictable conversion rates.
- Enables focus on channel growth and conversion rate management.

The NextUC Hosted Lync offering by ConnectSolutions™ is built using the Microsoft® Lync® Server 2013 Multitenant Hosting Pack which adds integrated telephony for a complete unified communications experience. Focusing on customers with less than 100 employees, the NextUC service was inundated with new users with limited technical expertise. This service bottleneck created an onboarding queue that affected its growth potential. To ease this burden, the NextUC team created a simplified self-service provisioning system with a “try before you buy” program to manage the flood of new potential customers. This program allows a non-technical potential customer to opt in to a 60-day free trial program using a simple step-by-step provisioning wizard. The potential customer will then have access to a hosted Lync deployment with integrated voice services within 10 minutes. This “no obligation” trial allows customers to fully experience the NextUC hosted Lync service before opting for the paid program. The trial program conversion rate is over 70 percent and increasing, providing a predictable stream of new customers. By pushing the provisioning out to the customer, the NextUC sales team can focus on growing their partner network to take the company to the next level.



Situation

ConnectSolutions was founded in 2007 and purchased NextUC in March of 2013. ConnectSolutions has a long history of delivering cloud-based collaboration services to Enterprise customers and successfully built a dedicated hosted Lync service that has been in production for over a year. The NextUC purchase allowed ConnectSolutions to extend its reach from the Enterprise down to the small sized organization with the integration of NextUC into the ConnectSolutions product portfolio.

The NextUC offering focuses on small sized businesses with less than 100 employees, which creates a support challenge in onboarding large numbers of non-technical customers. Unlike larger companies with dedicated IT staff to manage the adoption or conversion to a hosted unified communications service, NextUC's smaller company contacts were typically a non-technical owner, manager, or perhaps a secretary. This support challenge became even more significant in moving to a partner channel business model for the NextUC offering.

“Our “try before you buy” program greatly simplifies our sales process. It allows our customers to fully understand what they are buying before making a decision. For us, it provides a very predictable conversion rate of better than 70 percent and increasing.”

Bob Barnes, VP Business Development,
ConnectSolutions

The support challenge had two parts including sales support and onboarding. The value of unified communications has been traditionally hard to verbalize. It looks good on paper, but the power is not truly realized until the company actually uses the product. The easier sales approach is to sell a unified communications solution as an economical land line replacement. Therefore, the sales team has focused on

existing landline users with successful sales coming from proving that much lower cost IP Telephony quality is comparable to a land line. The unified communications functionality is often ignored, moving the sale to a bidding war between IP telephony providers.

Onboarding is another significant challenge when dealing with a smaller, non-technical customer. This typically meant that the NextUC team was required to assist in the onboarding process. This added a significant expense that had to be managed, and the limited staff created a bottleneck when large numbers of customers signed up simultaneously.

Solution

To solve the support challenge, the NextUC team created a simple self-provisioning “try before you buy” program that converts prospects into paying customers.

Self-Provisioning

The NextUC self-provisioning system is in three parts - a Web application within the ConnectSolutions Web site for setting up an account, an order wizard for completing the order, and a NextUC Administrative portal for onboarding users.

Web Application

The application is entered by clicking on the **Start Free Trial** button on the NextUC product page. It collects contact and company data to set up an account which takes a minute or two. At completion, the application sends an e-mail to the contact and launches a welcome page with guides to completing the onboarding process for the typical unified communications configurations. The e-mail provides a NextUC account ID, password, and a link to the NextUC Administrative Portal where the new customer can log in.

Order Wizard

After signing in, the NextUC Administrative Portal initially provides a five step order wizard that guides the customer through the ordering process. The order wizard takes a couple of minutes to complete. The process includes a description of the trial and its few limitations, the available options, and service cost

calculations if the customer continues with a paid plan after the trial. No payment information is required until the customer opts to continue after the trial. With the account set up and the correct number of users and options ordered, the wizard launches the NextUC Administrative Portal.

NextUC Administrative Portal

The portal provides access to all the expected functionality from configuration options to tools to account details. More importantly, five key options displayed in the initial dashboard simplify the onboarding process. The options include adding users, ordering additional services, activating a custom domain, activating Office 365, as well as inviting an employee to use NextUC.

“Offering a simple self-provisioned “try before you buy” program is a clear differentiator for us when competing for channel partners. This streamlines their ability to add additional income streams from their existing customers. They really like the predictable conversion rate from the trial program and we like that it focuses them on mass marketing its merits to their customers.”

Bob Barnes, VP Business Development,
ConnectSolutions

To onboard an employee, the customer selects the **Add a User** option. The customer provides the user’s name and contact information and then selects whether to use a NextUC phone number or to transfer an existing number. When the process completes, the user is sent a welcome e-mail providing their new phone number, a link to download the Lync client, user name, password, and links to an assortment of self-service guides. This process is repeated for each user in the organization.

Partner Channel

In considering a white label solution through the NextUC partner channel, the potential partners were very concerned with the amount of work it would take for them to convert their customers to the NextUC solution. Their available support capacity was often taxed by existing support obligations. Therefore, having the self-provisioned “try before you buy” program in place was a key differentiator for NextUC in their efforts to grow their partner channel.

Lync Infrastructure

The NextUC solution is an implementation of the Microsoft Lync Server 2013 Multitenant Pack for Partner Hosting with telephony integrated through a Microsoft Lync ecosystem partner.

Microsoft Lync Server 2013 Multitenant Pack for Partner Hosting

Microsoft® Lync® Server 2013 Multitenant Pack for Partner Hosting is a unified communications solution for telecommunication and hosting providers. The solution allows hosting providers to host their own fully integrated, multi-tenant unified communications service targeted to small and medium sized businesses. This is possible due to the unique multitenant aspect of the Microsoft unified communications solution making the hosting services solution cost-effective.

Telephony

The Microsoft Lync ecosystem is rich with partners allowing hosting partners to choose from many integrated services. Within the ecosystem, there are many telephony hosting partners that offer various configurations and service various geographical regions. This allows hosting partners to expand their services and coverage as they grow. These services are easily integrated with the Microsoft Lync Server 2013 Multitenant Pack for Partner Hosting deployment.

Benefits

Offering a simple self-provisioned “try before you buy” program is a clear differentiator for NextUC when competing for channel partners. It supports manageable growth, adds predictability to the sales

process, and allows both NextUC and their partners to focus on generating sales.

Manageable Growth

The key deterrent to sustainable growth for a hosting company is customer support. If this is not managed correctly, not only is future growth stunted, unsatisfied existing customers are likely to leave. This is why NextUC's self-service provisioning is so powerful. It moves company assets away from support toward growth areas including sales and marketing. This is the key differentiator that has made NextUC a success with its partner channel.

Predictable Sales

The "try before you buy" program has a predictable conversion rate of over 70 percent and increasing. Boasting this rate, NextUC can offer predictable results to channel partners that are used to much more varied results. This predictability by itself is motivation for the partners to market the program heavily. By focusing a sales person on adding 100 users per month to the trial program, partners can be assured that they will add approximately 70 new paying users per month regardless of what else the sales person sells.

"As a NextUC customer, what I appreciated the most was the no obligation "try before you buy" program that allowed me to see the true value of unified communications. I really had no idea what Lync was capable of. Once we started using it, we were hooked."

**Dave Chennault, President and CEO,
Skylite Systems**

Focus

With most of the customer support responsibilities eliminated, the NextUC team and their channel partners can focus most of their time on adding new trial users and improving conversion rates.

Microsoft Lync Server 2013

Multitenant Pack for Partner Hosting

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For more information about Microsoft Lync Server 2013 Multitenant Pack for Partner Hosting, go to:

<http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkId=245434>

NextUC Enterprise

ConnectSolutions™ NextUC Enterprise is a cloud Lync-based collaboration product that organizations of any size can use to improve the way they communicate while also lowering costs. Team collaboration can be driven by any number of different tools in ConnectSolutions™ NextUC's Cloud Lync product including telephone, unified messaging, video conferencing, online meetings, chat, or mobile devices.

For more information about NextUC Enterprise, go to:

<http://www.connectsolutions.com/products-solutions/microsoft-lync/nextuc-enterprise>

ConnectSolutions, Inc.

ConnectSolutions™ is the leading managed-cloud provider of unified communications solutions for small business, enterprise and government. ConnectSolutions™ MeetingCloud™ platform delivers an innovative, scalable cloud service that lowers total cost of UC ownership. We are the trusted provider of eLearning, collaboration and communication solutions that are reliable and secure.

For more information about ConnectSolutions, go to:

<http://www.connectsolutions.com>