



Canadian CLEC Offers Flat Rate Province-Wide Calling with Quintum's Tenor® Switches.

Leading Edge SIP-Based VoIP Infrastructure Lets InTouch Networks Reduce Long Distance Costs.

The Challenge

InTouch Networks founder and president Myron Groening loved playing with computers as a kid. But it wasn't until after he had established a successful construction business that he found himself building one of North America's most innovative telephone companies.

How does an entrepreneur make the leap from housing to telecom? In Groening's case, a conversation with a multi-unit property manager in the fall of 2002 sparked the initial idea. The manager was talking to Groening about all the services his residents consumed, and they both speculated about how the property owner could get a piece of that revenue. The conversation motivated Groening to do some research, which led to his conclusion that there was definitely a revenue opportunity there.

As Groening began to do market research, however, he found that demand wasn't as great as he might have hoped. So he began to re-think his business plan. That's when he began to zero in on the idea of flat-rate phone service.

"Manitoba is a very large, rural province," he explains. "A lot of people in outlying areas call Winnipeg, which is our largest city and a long-distance call for most of the population, fairly frequently. I knew from personal experience just how much of a phone bill you could run up in a month to that one location. So I began to look at using VoIP to offer unlimited call volume to that one location for around \$20 a month."

After polling consumers, Groening saw he was really on to something. So he set about doing the necessary research to make his idea a reality. He contacted several VoIP equipment vendors – including Cisco, MultiTech and Quintum – to evaluate their switching platforms. He also began to make some strategic decisions about the architecture of his new network.

"One thing I decided on fairly early in the game was to go with SIP, rather than H.323," Groening says. "H.323 was more established, but it wouldn't offer us the long-term feature richness that I felt we would need to evolve a full set of rich value-added communications services over the long term."

The problem with SIP was that vendors' implementations of the protocol were still either immature or non-existent. But he forged ahead with his business plan anyway and – using hardware from multiple vendors – began offering service in March 2003.

Unfortunately, while it was clear that the market would embrace flat-rate calling within the province, the pilot network that Groening and his team had cobbled together was less than ideal. Devices would stop communicating with each other for no obvious reason. Variations in the local

incumbent provider's switching environment would have unexpected impact on the functions such as caller ID. So, while he continued to gain customers, he found himself losing some too.

He also found that not all of his vendors were especially responsive when he needed help. "A lot of them forced me to go through customer service, instead of letting me access their technical people directly," he notes. "It could take me three weeks to get something resolved – which isn't something you can afford when you're trying to get a new business off the ground."

The Solution

It was over the course of those first painful months that Groening began to appreciate Quintum strong customer orientation. Quintum's technical staff worked closely with Groening to understand and address the new networking issues he was encountering as he expanded his network and added new features. Groening's team was able to work directly with Quintum engineers to write new code when necessary and re-configure his hardware as required to ensure its stability and performance.

"Quintum demonstrated a real commitment to helping me pioneer SIP-based bypass," he declares. "Ultimately, they were the ones who showed themselves to be a business partner I could trust."

As a result of that commitment and trust, Groening eliminated all the other hardware and went with 100% Quintum infrastructure. He worked out the kinks in his network and now has stable, high-quality VoIP service to nine POPs across Manitoba. He has expanded his flat-rate offering to the entire province for just \$24.95 monthly – plus five cents per minute for the rest of North America.

In addition to giving Quintum the highest marks for service and support, Groening also gives kudos to the company's Tenor switching technology. "Tenor switches deliver outstanding voice quality and excellent interoperability," he says. "They also provide a variety of critical functions that we need to bridge multiple ISPs and maintain the security of our environment."

With a stable network in place and the technical support of Quintum behind him, Groening is now marketing his flat-rate province-wide voice services more aggressively. "We are positioned to have a major impact on our regional telecom market and give customers the kind of deal they deserve," Groening says. "Quintum has played an instrumental role in making this happen, and I personally look forward to a mutually fruitful business partnership with them as this market continues to evolve."

