

> FOR A RUGGED ENVIRONMENT,
A DURABLE SOLUTION

NORTEL



T.A. Brannon Steel

A longtime, well-satisfied Nortel customer recognized it was time to update its mobile voice system. It found the answer with a Nortel Digital Mobility deployment — and, in the process, also now enjoys a fully converged Nortel solution, featuring the Nortel Business Communications Manager 400.

Case Study

In a very challenging environment — millions of pounds of steel, heavy machinery, extreme noise levels and radio interference — T.A. Brannon Steel needs a particularly sturdy wireless solution to maintain business-critical communication links. Today they have that solution.

Customer: T.A. Brannon Steel, established in 1968, is a privately owned heavy-equipment manufacturer based in Brampton, Ontario.

Challenge: T.A. Brannon Steel had been very pleased with its Nortel Companion handsets and with its longtime-deployed Nortel Norstar communications system. The time had come, though, for an upgrade — one that would provide broader coverage and the opportunity to take advantage of a richer set of applications from one integrated platform.

Solution: A Nortel Digital Mobility solution that includes the Nortel Business Communications Manager (BCM) 400, the Nortel Digital Mobility Controller 320, eight base stations covering three T.A. Brannon Steel locations and Nortel Digital Mobility Handsets.



“A key consideration for me is that Nortel is a one-stop shop. I have all Nortel products... I have terrific support.”

— Glenn De Dieu, operations manager,
T.A. Brannon Steel

Benefits: T.A. Brannon Steel now has a future-ready mobile communications solution providing the durable handsets required within this challenging industrial environment. The Nortel Digital Mobility handsets feature caller ID, conferencing, access to voicemail and a “phenomenal” battery life, which comes in particularly handy given Brannon’s round-the-clock operations. Brannon also now has much broader coverage than with its Companion solution.

Brannon has a converged Nortel solution based on BCM400 that provides unified messaging and allows its salesforce to make and receive calls from wherever they are as if they’re in the office. Brannon is also looking at deploying PDAs that will emulate the Nortel IP Softphone 2050, seamlessly integrating into the network.

Factor in 10 million or more pounds of steel laying about at any given time, consistently clamorous noise levels, dust in the air, 20-ton radio-controlled overhead cranes — in short, precisely the conditions you’d expect within the warehouse of a high-capacity heavy-machinery manufacturer. Now attempt to introduce into that environment a wireless communications system equal to the challenge — no small task.

Nortel and its channel partner Network Communication Services (NCS) got the job done, and earned top marks in doing it.

NCS owner Randy Piitz suggested to T.A. Brannon Steel operations manager Glenn De Dieu that he consider Nortel as a solution provider for a network upgrade De Dieu required. Brannon was already a Nortel Norstar customer and was using Companion handsets. De Dieu was, at the time, looking for a replacement to the Companion mobility system. The Companions had worked very well for a long time — likewise, the Norstar. But De Dieu’s Companion solution was past its prime — it was getting old and expensive to maintain, and he didn’t like the risk associated with using after-market parts. It was time to take a look at more contemporary solutions.

“We were looking for something that would be well supported,” says De Dieu, “and that would be as vibrant as the Companion system.” Brannon considered other vendors but was more comfortable with Nortel and the reliability its products had demonstrated to date.

Gotta be tough

Convergence was of interest to De Dieu, but wasn’t as important as the need for a rugged, durable mobility solution for his employees.

Simply put, says De Dieu: “We need durable; we’re heavy-equipment manufacturers; we deal with six to seven million pounds of processed steel a month. You drop something here and there’s a pretty good chance it’s either going to bounce and break, or just break.”

The Nortel Digital Mobility solution Brannon has now deployed is ideal for just such a rugged environment. Brannon is looking to transition to the newly released Digital Mobility 7440 Handset, a full-featured handset with a rugged design for harsh environments. The 7440 Handset even has IP 54 classification, meaning it’s extremely well protected from dust and splashing water.

These Digital Mobility handsets offer broader coverage over the Companions — “exceptional coverage,” by De Dieu’s reckoning. The base stations can be placed much farther from the Nortel Digital Mobility Controller 320 and up to six repeaters per

base station can be deployed to extend coverage (a Digital Mobility solution can cover an area of up to 1.5 million square feet) — all of which is good news to De Dieu, as Brannon is now expanding into two new buildings.

The Digital Mobility handsets also offer improved security technology and employ frequency-hopping technology for overall enhanced call quality. De Dieu also really likes the fact that the Digital Mobility handsets have excellent volume levels that can be adjusted individually — that’s a great asset in an environment as noisy as a heavy-machinery warehouse.

An improvement in battery performance with the Digital Mobility solution was another big selling point for De Dieu: “With a moderate user — one who isn’t always on the phone, they’ll go an entire week before they have to charge their batteries. The life expectancy of the batteries is really phenomenal.”

New business opportunities, no pain

As Brannon got further into discussions with Piitz and Nortel, “we began to see an opportunity not only to replace the Companion system but to evolve from Norstar to BCM — which gave us the ability to do some neat things.

“Like, for example, not having our sales guys have to drive in to the office. They could have an extension in their offices in their homes and answer and make phone calls as if they’re here, and the customer doesn’t know the difference. That’s a functionality that came right out of the box with the BCM400.”

De Dieu is referring to the Nortel Business Communications Manager 400, a major enticement for De Dieu to begin considering something more than the handset upgrade. Unlike the Companion system, Digital Mobility is fully supported on all of the latest versions of BCM. What that means for Brannon is an all-in-one platform for converged voice and data services that offers such applications as unified messaging — with voicemail, email and faxes all retrievable from one folder, multimedia call center and interactive voice response.

“We’re now putting in unified messaging,” says De Dieu, “so that faxes are automatically sent to the receptionist and she can look at them in electronic format and delete them or forward them on as necessary, saving a lot of paper. It’s all about reducing waste.”

In a generally traditional industry, T.A. Brannon Steel is showing that the implementation of new technology can be absolutely painless.

“The training session for our outside sales team,” says De Dieu, “took about five minutes. We said, ‘Okay, here’s what you do: When you log in remotely through your VPN, you’ve launched this program. It’ll get you an IP extension. That’s it; you’re done. Call the receptionist, tell her this is your extension, this is where you’re going to be for the next six hours, and you can make phones calls using your PC as if you’re in the office, or she can transfer calls directly to you.’ It was very simple, and they’ve been very happy.”

It’s a breeze

“A key consideration for me,” says De Dieu, “is that Nortel is a one-stop shop. I have all Nortel products. I’m not mixing and matching and trying to determine, if something goes wrong, whose fault it is. I have terrific support — but then the system doesn’t require a lot of support.”

T.A. Brannon Steel needed a wireless solution that would withstand the tests of a challenging environment.





Of the BCM400, De Dieu says, “I like the fact that I’m able to manage it across the network. I can log into it, there’s a graphical user interface, and it can be managed without actually having to be physically onsite all the time; it’s like instant access. And if something happens, I don’t have to wait hours for a technician to drive in. If he has a PC and a password, he can log into my system and he can troubleshoot right there and then. Downtime is reduced considerably.”

Good shape

Again though, it all comes back to durability: T.A. Brannon Steel needed a wireless solution that would withstand the tests of a challenging environment. Digital Mobility offered a more solid and more cost-effective, simplified approach than WLAN, with the Digital Mobility Controller 320 able to support up to eight base stations and 32 handsets — handsets that can withstand their rugged environment.

De Dieu is now looking at upgrading to BCM400 Release 4.0, and also considering adding Nortel IP Phone 2050, a PDA-based IP Telephony Client, for staff on the road to use within WLAN hotspots.

“We’re now in expansion mode,” De Dieu concludes, “so there’ll be new base stations coming in, new phones and a host of other good things.”

As Brannon continues to successfully grow its business, its Digital Mobility solution is growing with it. Nortel Digital Mobility is founded on a modular architecture that facilitates a pay-as-you-grow approach — any two Digital Mobility Controllers can be linked together and base stations added to support a maximum of 64 mobile users.

Says Glenn De Dieu: “I think we’re in good shape for the future.”

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