PIZZA HUT AND KFC IN MALAYSIA

CASE STUDY   ASTERISK

OVERVIEW

Once a mere township of Kuala Lumpur on the 100,000 square-mile Malay Peninsula, the city of Petaling Jaya is home to QSR Brands Bhd ("privately owned") — the headquarters of Pizza Hut Malaysia and KFC Holdings Malaysia Bhd. The Malay Peninsula shares a land border to the west with Thailand, to the east with Indonesia and Brunei, and maritime borders with Vietnam, Malaysian Borneo, and the Philippines. Furthermore, Petaling Jaya lies across a narrow causeway spanning the Straits of Johor connecting it to Singapore, making it a busy hub for the leading integrated food services group in the Asia Pacific region. Larger and more popular in the area than the Golden Arches of McDonald's, QSR operates Pizza Huts throughout Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Cambodia, and India; as well as operating 640 KFC restaurants, 27 sit-down RasaMas "roasters" restaurants, 74 Kedai Ayamas convenience stores and supermarkets, the Kampuchea Food Corporation, and Yayasan Amal Bistari.

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Having spent 25 years as a restaurant manager and QSR's general manager for training and operations, in 2010, Winston Lee saw an opportunity to expand workflow efficiency and communications by developing a business outsource partnership with QSR called eFinite Value Sdn Bhd to handle all call center operations for the company and its subsidiaries. Now CEO of the company, Lee acquired Pizza Hut Delivery's restaurant service division (PHD), established in 1996, and consisting of over 168 representatives; and formed a second call center of about 100 representatives to handle Kedai Ayamas, their grocery and food-related delivery division, both located in Petaling Jaya.

Unfortunately, PHD's more than 20-year-old Avaya telecommunications system accompanied the acquisition. Combined with having been recently victimized by a computer hacking scandal that caused massive problems with the PHD ordering system, Lee took his $1 million annual budget and began shopping telecom solutions that could monitor the memory usage of their CPU processors; and that could handle a minimum of 300,000 calls per month.

"We were confronted with four main issues," Lee says. "Cost and flexibility were foremost. We also had to consider future growth and expansion since I am sitting on several new call center contracts for a chain of hospitals, and e-ticketing for public transportation. Also under consideration was the need for trust and integrity in the solution, so we were leaning towards a name-brand, off-the-shelf product."

It was purely by accident Winston Lee learned about Asterisk — in fact, Lee contacted Asian Pacific telecommunications distributor IntuitTech Sdn Bhd, to investigate the viability of their Nagios IT monitoring systems, which they considered a workable solution in protecting them against future hacking. Unknown to Lee, IntuitTech is also a leading provider of Asterisk, the world's most popular open source telecommunications software.

After consulting with IntuitTech's CEO, Dr. Daniel Krahenbuhl about eFinite's long-term goals and intended growth, Lee found himself in deep discussions about the flexibility and price point benefits of this amazing new open source solution — Asterisk.

"EFinite did not have existing IP functionality, but ironically, they weren't looking for it either," recalls Marco Di Cerbo, chief strategy officer for IntuitTech. "We were able to solve all four requirements, but I believe it is safe to say that in the end, it was the price point advantage Asterisk had over Avaya and any other solutions he had investigated, that got his attention."

Is Asterisk Too Good to be True?

"Our Avaya system was end-of-life. It was almost impossible to find parts when we needed repairs," Lee says. "We looked at a couple of options with Avaya. We considered trading it in on a lease for new equipment, and we accepted a proposal to upgrade to a new system; but neither of these were practical options." Lee understood that trying to replace the old Avaya with a new Avaya was going to be very expensive. "Everything about Avaya is proprietary. EFinite required a solution that could handle our call volume without the exorbitant licensing costs attached to that much call volume."

Lee was open-minded about an opportunity to save thousands of dollars, but he was skeptical. "I'll be honest. On paper, Asterisk looked too good to be true," he admits. "It seemed to offer a flexible solution that catered to our every need, fulfilled our wish list, and in fact, had features we hadn't even considered."

Asterisk has the ability to convert an ordinary computer into a feature-rich voice communications server and its flexibility allowed eFinite to create and deploy a wide range of telephony applications and services, including IP PBXs, VoIP gateways, call center ACDs, and IVR systems.

"Of course there was the big question: How much? The funny thing is, we prepared for a slaughter that never came." Because it is open source, the Asterisk software is free. When IntuitTech presented their package, Asterisk was going to cost about 30% of the Avaya system, and the price included Yealink IP phones. "That got my attention! No licensing fees, no proprietary equipment to buy, no concerns about compatibility if we patched together an IP infrastructure using something besides Avaya."

The Asterisk Solution

IntuitTech designed and built an IP-based infrastructure using standard hardware from Dell or HP that for the time being runs parallel to the old Avaya system in the Kedai Ayamas call center. It took about six weeks to install Asterisk on a Linux operating system, test it, and make the switch. "We divorced ourselves from our old and run down, but still working, PBX server and it went through without a hitch. It was so easy!," Lee says. "EFinite, for PHD, is now a very significant client implementing Asterisk in Malaysia."

EFinite's Asterisk solution has four PRIs connected initially to the Asterisk servers, configured in a cluster with room to add four more PRIs in the future. It features a customized, full-featured dashboard based on a reporting solution called Asternic that displays a variety of performance reports and statistics, deployed to provide call centre managers with the statistics needed for daily operations. Lee says they were amazed and completely surprised by all the 'extras' they received with the Asterisk product. "It provides all these fancy reports we were not expecting that help us track and analyze calls for workflow efficiency and training purposes. On the old system, the reporting process was complicated and had so many limitations, we didn't bother.

"The power of the Asterisk system just blew us away. Its flexibility allowed us to configure Asterisk so it handles calls with a microscopic degree of precision, a process not possible with traditional PBX systems. Asterisk also makes it easier to present data to callers from CRM, billing, etcetera; and because it is scalable, it integrated seamlessly with the new IP infrastructure, including a new set of toll free phone lines. It supports multiple VoIP protocols like SIP, IAX, H323; and supports a broad spectrum of third party handsets and soft phones. Even better, eFinite maintains and manages the system as well as the IP technology, which helps in planning future growth of the company.

"I tell people all the time — I got a Rolls Royce for the price of a Nissan," Lee laughs. "I honestly thought the price was so irresistible, they were going to have to go back and recalculate. I kept thinking I had bought a Rolls Royce and they were going to come back later and say, 'Oops. We forgot the tires, the keys, and the steering wheel. That will cost you extra.' But it never happened. Instead, we were looking at an Avaya system that would have cost $350,000 US, and Asterisk that wound up costing us $90,000 US.

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