

8x8 Provides iCruise.com with a Complete Voice, Contact Center and Business Continuity Solution

iCruise.com, online travel and hospitality agency specializing in cruises

8x8's Unified Communications Solution Makes iCruise.com Happy

Customer: iCruise.com, a division of WMPH Vacations

Industry: Online travel and hospitality

Location:

Delray Beach, Florida

Website: www.icruise.com

8x8 Products: Virtual Office and Virtual Contact Center

Favorite 8x8 Features:

- A real-time API that integrates with in-house CRM system
- Brand-specific scripting that appears on agents' screens when they answer calls
- The ability to add or reduce licenses as seasonal business needs change
- Improved business continuity through off-site PBX hosting

Initial Setup:

80 agents, 118 extensions

Connectivity Type: Ethernet

Product Replaced: Mitel 5000

Primary Reason for Choosing 8x8:

Needed a complete communications solution that combines hosted phone service with a contact center

iCruise.com, a division of WMPH Vacations, is one of the largest sellers of cruises in the US, serving 80,000 passengers a year. While most customers find the travel agency online, only 20% complete their bookings online—the other 80% dial into the call center to talk with an agent. iCruise.com needed a total communications solution with both Internet phone service and a hosted call center. Only 8x8 was able to deliver a complete solution for the company.

When business partners Uf Tukul and Don Walker teamed up to start an online travel and hospitality agency in 2003, they named their holding company WMPH—"We Make People Happy"—Vacations. Specializing in cruises, Tukul and Walker sell vacation packages under various brand- and private label names. The best-known one is iCruise.com, a division with the most downloaded cruise-finder app in the US. Almost 50% of the company's bookings now come through this app.

In the decade since its founding, iCruise.com has grown rapidly from five to more than 120 employees. About half of these employees work remotely; the other half mainly work in the company's Delray, Florida, headquarters.

On-Premises PBX Limits Business Growth and Continuity

But the company's continued growth was limited by a premises-based PBX that was difficult to expand. Essential business features, such as call recording and reporting, were either cost-prohibitive or not available at all.

And the co-owners had an even more pressing concern: business continuity.

"Our company is located in the Hurricane Belt," explains Tukul. "Some years we lost power multiple times because of the storms. Whenever we lost power, our on-site PBX didn't work, bringing business to a halt."

"We realized we had no true 'hurricane plan' in place for our company," says Walker. "To protect ourselves, we decided to move to a hosted PBX solution."

Decision Maker: Only 8x8 Can Take Communications to the Next Level with a Contact Center

In May 2012, Tukul and Walker began looking for a replacement communications system. They quickly narrowed the list to five vendors and sent out RFPs. Over the next few months, they heard sales pitches, listened to presentations and watched product demos. All five solutions offered business VoIP benefits, but only 8x8 had the complete communications package Tukul and Walker required.

"8x8 has a combined phone and contact center solution that can do it all: provide inbound and outbound calling, live agent chat, click-to-call, and live routing options," says Walker. "It's a one-stop shop for all our needs."



"The ability to have both a hosted phone system and a virtual contact center was the tipping point for us. Selecting one of the other vendors would have meant keeping our on-site PBX and then adding on a new call center. With 8x8, we didn't have to compromise—we got everything we wanted."

Uf Tükel

Co-President and Founder
WMPH Vacations

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8x8 CRM Integration Helps Track Advertising Effectiveness

The business partners signed a contract with 8x8 in late September 2012, and within two months had deployed the new communications solutions companywide. They also began working on a project to integrate the solution with their internally developed CRM system via 8x8's API. That work was completed a month later, in January, 2013.

"Our CRM system is home-grown and constantly evolving, so we needed help configuring the 8x8 API to pass over relevant call data," says Walker. "8x8's support team was phenomenally responsive as we worked on the project."

Now when customers contact iCruise.com, call details such as the city, phone number and the ad that spurred them to call—identifiable from the virtual number listed in each ad—are captured and passed to the CRM system. The data can then be used to measure the effectiveness of the company's marketing efforts.

"We're much better able to track our sales leads and figure out where to spend our advertising dollars," says Tükel.

Click-to-Call and Broadcast Messaging Boost Sales Per Agent

The various brands and private label products that iCruise.com sells are also represented more accurately, enhancing the customer experience. Using call data passed by the 8x8 API, the CRM system presents the answering agent with appropriate brand information, along with a call-handling script to follow. For example, if a customer calls in on a number designated for Hawaii Cruises, the agent is prompted to answer "Aloha, Hawaii Cruises, how may I help you?"

The integration of 8x8's smart contact center features with the company's CRM software has boosted agent productivity as well. iCruise.com frequently does "cycle marketing", where customers are contacted at specific times, such as right before their departure and when they return. Agents can easily place these "bon voyage" and "welcome back" calls right from the customer's account record using 8x8's click-to-call capabilities. There's no need to look up phone numbers, or switch to a different communications system to place outbound calls.

In addition, iCruise.com uses 8x8's broadcast messaging feature to keep customers updated about their bookings. For example, the company can quickly set up and send a broadcast message letting all passengers know their ship's arrival time, or what the weather forecast is for their destination.



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Don Walker
Co-President and Founder
WMPH Vacations

Management Features Help Handle Impatient Customers

Customers and agents aren’t the only ones benefiting from 8x8. Managing the contact center is easier and more efficient too. Using 8x8’s presence detection feature, managers can instantly see which agents—including remote agents—are on calls and for how long. If agents need to be reassigned, they can do it quickly.

Managers can set service-level thresholds on queues and include an option for customers to leave voicemail if they don’t want to stay in queue. Customer messages are distributed to the sales management team, which assigns agents for immediate follow up.

“Customers like the option to leave a message instead of holding, but it only works if we get back to them quickly,” says Tukul. “With 8x8, our sales managers can ensure that we respond to voicemail messages right away.”

Custom Reports Measure Companywide Performance

Custom reports help managers run detailed reports on call statistics and distribution channels (the phone numbers used to distinguish brands and private label products). And because both remote and in-office workers are united on the same communications platform, performance can be measured at the agent level and across the company.

“The 8x8 API essentially streams information to our CRM system in real time, allowing us to run all kinds of reports,” explains Tukul. “We didn’t realize until after the integration how much we can do with it.”

Call Recording Saves Money, Improves Agent Training and Customer Service

Although switching to 8x8 service has saved iCruise.com money across the board, the biggest savings have come from call recording. The company records all customer calls so that disputes and misunderstandings can be resolved quickly.

“Call recording used to be very costly for us,” notes Walker. “Now it’s included in our monthly service fee, which saves us a lot of money.”

The company also uses call recording for employee training purposes. Managers can organize and listen to calls by agent, queue, or distribution channel.

“Agent performance has improved significantly as a result of these management reviews,” says Tukul. “Call recording lets us identify and address any issues so that our agents deliver the best possible service to customers.”

Similarly, sales managers monitor both live and recorded calls at the beginning of each new marketing campaign.

“By listening in, we can tweak our outreach efforts and help agents close more sales,” says Walker.

Weathering Storms Without Losing Business

Tukul and Walker credit 8x8 with helping them prepare for the inevitable storms that sweep through southern Florida. Now when the office loses power, employees stay in business by using the 8x8 mobile app on their smartphones and tablets. They can also switch to the “soft” 8x8 phone on their laptops, or plug their desk phones in at home.

"Depending on what our current needs are, we can add or reduce licenses, buy new phone numbers, move agents around, and change our distribution channels. We don't have to wait for our IT department or service provider to do it for us. 8x8 allows us to keep our contact center aligned with our business, so we pay for what we actually need at the time."

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"Our employees can work practically anywhere, as long as there's an Internet connection," says Tukul. "If there's no power at the office, we can all work remotely. Customers have no idea that the office is closed because the service is seamless. Thanks to 8x8, we're much better prepared for the storm season than we have been in the past."

Self-Service Simplifies Moves, Adds and Changes

As owners of a seasonal travel business, Tukul and Walker constantly need to add phone numbers, brands, private label products, and agents to their contact center. They also need the flexibility to ramp up and down during the busy season and off-season. 8x8's self-service system administration makes doing all that very easy.

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Total Communications: Talking to 'Their Agent' Strengthens Customer Relationships

Both Tukul and Walker agree that 8x8's integration with their back-office CRM system has enabled iCruise.com to build stronger relationships with customers.

"Most businesses set up their contact centers to be transaction-based, but we're in the travel and hospitality industry, which is relationship-based," says Walker. "Our customers take their vacation planning very seriously. When they call, they don't want to talk to just any agent; they want to talk to 'their' agent. Through the 8x8 API, we're able to capture and track each customer's booking history, and then present that unique history to the agent who takes the call. It personalizes the customer's contact with us, and deepens our relationship with them."

Tukul points to 8x8's total communications solution as another important aspect of relationship building.

"Our 8x8 solution can handle any kind of customer contact: phone, online, chat, voicemail, email. Customers get to choose how they want to communicate, and we're able to give each of them the excellent service they deserve."

To learn more, call 1.866.862.2811 or visit www.8x8.com



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