

8x8 Unified Communications Provide Connectivity, Flexibility and Reliability for Global Manufacturer

Artco Group, heavy steel plate manufacturing



After years of struggling with poor-quality phone service, Artco Group started looking for a cloud-based solution that was both dependable and affordable. By transitioning to 8x8 hosted business VoIP, Artco Group now has crystal clear voice quality, lower international phone bills, and reliable service even when disaster strikes.

Artco began shortly after World War II in 1948 when Arthur Himmel, a US Marine, camped outside the Brooklyn Navy Yard in a sleeping bag so that he would be first on line to purchase surplus steel being sold by the navy. That first purchase of steel would launch a company that has been a significant player in the international trade of steel ever since.

Now headquartered in White Plains, New York, the Artco Group has evolved from a single company trading in steel and other metals, to a family of companies that provide one-stop shopping for all heavy plate manufacturing needs. Today the Artco Group includes Artco Steel, which produces heavy plates, and Houston Blow Pipe, which fabricates custom components for the energy industry.

The Artco Group's evolution was driven in part by a series of acquisitions. First, in 2007, the Group acquired a steel processing facility in Hannibal, Ohio, a remote rural area near the border of West Virginia. Then in 2009, the Group acquired Houston Blowpipe, a leading component fabricator in Houston, Texas. Within a decade, the Artco Group expanded from a single office with five employees to a multi-site organisation with more than 250.

Hardware Crashes and Failures Made Phone Service Unreliable

As the Artco Group added companies, offices and workers, CIO Damian Brennan realised that installing traditional phone service was not a viable option; the process was simply too time-consuming to keep up with the organisation's rapid growth. He decided to lease a server-based NEC system. But maintaining a hardware solution in-house introduced a new set of problems.



Customer: Artco Group

Industry: Heavy steel plate manufacturing

Locations: White Plains, New York (Headquarters), Hannibal, Ohio (Manufacturing), Bedford Heights, Ohio (Sales), Houston, Texas (Fabrication)

8x8 Products: Virtual Office

Favorite 8x8 Features:

- Programmable ring groups
- Mobile app for iPhone/iPad
- Portable desk phones

Number of Lines: 82

Time to Deploy: 3-4 weeks

Connectivity Type: Fiber: White Plains, Hannibal, Houston; DSL: Bedford Heights

Vendors Replaced: NEC and local VoIP provider (Houston)

Website: www.artcosteel.com



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—Damian Brennan
CIO
Artco Group

Hard drive crashes on the NEC system resulted in lost voicemail messages, and controller card failures brought the whole phone system down. And because of the system’s gateway configuration, when service in New York crashed, so did phone service in Ohio and Texas.

Poor voice quality and dropped calls plagued users, particularly those at the Ohio manufacturing facility whose phone service was delivered via copper wiring laid in 1963. The complexity and interplay of the Artco Group’s VPN, broadband connectivity, NEC hardware, and IP phone service made it difficult to troubleshoot and resolve problems.

Need for Scalability and Flexibility Drives Move to the Cloud

The global recession caused another jolt. The steel industry was hit hard, and the Artco Group began consolidating offices and cutting back. But the on-premises NEC phone system which had made it easier to scale up also made it difficult to scale down. With the end of the five-year lease in sight, Brennan decided to move the Group’s phone system to the cloud.

“I went to business school to learn how to run a company, not maintain an Exchange server or a phone system,” explains Brennan. “Why devote internal resources to those kinds of functions if they add no value to the business? It made sense for us to outsource our IT infrastructure to a cloud provider.”

Simplicity of 8x8 Business Phone Service and Pricing Make a Strong Impression

In 2011, Brennan attended a CIO conference in Orlando, Florida, and was immediately impressed by two cloud-based technologies: 8x8 hosted or business VoIP and Google docs.

“The sheer simplicity of 8x8’s phone service and pricing model really struck me,” he recalls. “You just plug it in and it works. Every month you pay for what you need. It almost seemed too good to be true.”

Brennan piloted 8x8 phone service at the Artco Group’s sales office in Cleveland, Ohio, a high call volume environment. Once he got the thumbs up from the sales team, he began rolling out the service in New York and Ohio.

Unified Communications Switchover Easy, with Better Voice Quality

According to Brennan, the trickiest part of implementing 8x8 business phone service was porting the Artco Group’s numbers over from their previous provider. As the numbers were released from the previous provider over a three- to four-week span, 8x8 would activate them on the new cloud-based business phone service.

“8x8 managed the transition very well for us,” says Brennan. “Users had two phones on their desks for a few weeks, but it wasn’t a problem. They used their old phones until 8x8 activated their numbers, and from then on the new business phone service worked fine. We had no complaints from our users—which is exactly what I wanted.”



In White Plains, we lost power for four days after Sandy. 8x8's auto-forwarding kicked in flawlessly. We used our iPhones and home phones to take calls and keep the business going during the disaster."

—Damian Brennan
CIO, Artco Group

Far from complaining, employees in at the Hannibal, Ohio, processing facility were delighted with the new 8x8 business phone service.

"For them it was like, 'Wow! People can hear me now!'" says Brennan. "The improvement in voice quality and reliability was amazing, especially since we were still using the same old copper wires."

8x8 Provides International Connectivity and Cost Savings

8x8 cloud communications have also brought a new level of freedom and flexibility to Artco Group employees, who used to have to answer calls at their desks. According to Brennan, many of those desk phones are now covered in dust.

"8x8's mobile app and portable VoIP phones let us take calls anywhere and everywhere," he says. "Recently I was backpacking in Spain, and I answered a business call on my iPhone. 8x8 gives us seamless connectivity around the world, which is huge."

Find out how 8x8 can help your business. Call **1800 854 171** or visit **www.8x8.com/au**

