

# NEWTEK

## the Small Business Authority

Ensuring the highest performing system is in place for quality assurance and functionality

### The Background

Newtek (NASDAQ: NEWT) is a provider of business services to the SMB market under The Small Business Authority™ and Newtek™ brands. Newtek provides services, such as payroll, Web site design, insurance, merchant processing, and more, so SMB owners don't have to do it themselves. Established in 1998, Newtek has more than 100,000 business accounts in all 50 states, and provides 24/7 customer and technical support. The company's highly skilled staff of trained professionals helps businesses grow sales, improve technological efficiencies, reduce expenses, and minimize risks. The company is headquartered in New York, NY, and maintains five sites nationwide, including two large contact call centers.

### The Communications Wish List

If any company knows how important excellent customer service is to its bottom line, it's Newtek. That's why when the company's voice services lease was coming to an end, Bob Cichon, Newtek CTO, decided to look around. He wasn't unhappy with the service he was receiving, but he wanted to explore all options. As customer service is the company's business, it was critical that he maintain 24/7 communications, especially in the contact centers. One of the major problems Mr. Cichon saw was the reliability and stability of his current system. Newtek has multiple locations and each had a standalone voice system; there was no centrally connected system. This proved to be difficult to manage and maintain. If there was a problem, the whole group would go down. In addition, if there was an extreme weather event and a group lost power, it also lost its phone system. "This happened to us a few times," recalled Mr. Cichon. "And frankly, there's no backup at that point." While his service provider was good at responding to emergencies, he still couldn't centrally manage the system.

"I wanted to see how we could avoid these situations in the future," commented Mr. Cichon on his plan to improve communications efficiencies at Newtek. "I wanted to, one, connect remote staff in the future outside of a server-based geography. Two, keep phone lines coming into a central location even if we move outside of the area code. Three, eliminate geography problems, particularly with disaster recovery. Four, give our remote staff more communications flexibility."

### Choosing From a Broad Portfolio of Solutions

First, Mr. Cichon looked into upgrading his current system. If he kept the same system and equipment, the cost would be half that of a new system. If he upgraded to a new system from the same vendor, the cost would be higher. "But cost wasn't everything," he explained. "It was a matter of what I wanted in a feature set." So he decided to explore other options before making any decision.

He met with Black Box and explained what he wanted. Because Black Box has a broad portfolio of solutions from all the leading communications manufacturers, two different solutions were presented side-by-side. This way the Newtek team could make an informed, objective decision. In the end, they chose a Cisco unified communications system.

"Black Box did a great job working with us to help us determine benefits and costs," Mr. Cichon explained.

**Industry:**  
Small Business Services

**Project:**  
Cisco Unified Communications System

**Major benefits:**  
Extensibility  
Quality assurance/monitoring  
Component-level functionality  
Central management

**Black Box did a great job working with us to help us determine benefits and costs.**

Bob Cichon, Chief Technology Officer, Newtek

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## The Benefits of the Cisco System

In researching different unified communications systems, Mr. Cichon and his team worked with Black box to identify a list of attributes they wanted. These included:

- Extensibility. Mr. Cichon wanted a system that had the ability to grow with Newtek.

"Going through a phone system turnover is very dramatic, especially for a company that does business on the phone," he explained. "I don't want to do this again in five years." Black Box helped demonstrate how the Cisco system gave him the ability to grow and add on as his company grows.

- Quality assurance/monitoring. Because of the nature of Newtek's business, it needs to manage, record, and do quality assurance on all calls in specific business units.

- Component level functionality. Functionality is extremely important and Mr. Cichon wanted the ability to "plug and unplug" features. "In five years, I want to still be happy with the system I have and still be able to plug in components to make it what I want."

- Geography. Black Box set up the Cisco system to give Mr. Cichon the ability to manage all his locations from one central office. "The system gives me systemic security and availability," he explained. "I have no more problems with geography, disaster recovery, and moves."

## The Black Box Team was There

Within six months of signing on with Black Box, all of Newtek's sites were on the new system. Black Box managed all the cutovers after hours so as not to disturb communications.

"Migrating four geographies and 400 people to a new phone system is quite dramatic," said Mr. Cichon.

In describing how the installation went, Mr. Cichon had nothing but praise for the Black Box and Cisco teams.

"We anticipated there would be issues. The interaction between Black Box and Cisco through those issues is what mattered. No one left me alone during this...Nobody dropped the ball—whether it was the middle of the night, weekends, etc. The Black Box team was there working through it." Overall, the implementation went very well. The issues were very few and were cleared up within 24 hours.



**"Black Box was very responsive working through issues, even outside issues. I can't say enough about the escalation path. Nobody dropped the ball—whether it was the middle of the night, weekends, etc. It didn't matter. The Black Box team was there working through it."**

Bob Cichon, Chief Technology Officer, Newtek

