

## Software Development for the Voice Communications Industry



**Ray Ryan - CEO**

### **About iQ NetSolutions**

iQ NetSolutions is a Veteran-owned business located in Northern California. iQ's VistaPoint software has been in use on thousands of desktops around the world since being released in 1996. The software is fully compatible with Cisco CallManager and has proven to be dependable and adaptable for every vertical market to include healthcare, financial, energy, education, municipalities, government, agencies, and multi-national, multi-cluster deployments.

**Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine**

### **CEOCFO: Mr. Ryan, what is iQ NetSolutions?**

**Mr. Ryan:** iQ NetSolutions is a software developer. We develop software for the voice communications industry, specifically for Cisco VoIP customers. Any company or organization that has deployed or plans to deploy a Cisco Unified Communications Manager would be a good candidate for our VistaPoint attendant consoles.

### **CEOCFO: What are some of the particular challenges in software in this particular arena?**

**Mr. Ryan:** I would say distribution and being able to penetrate certain markets particularly where you are competing with a manufacturer who has an OEM agreement with a comparable product. Since most Cisco customers perceive the OEM product to be superior, they tend to go with it without looking at their options. This places the onus on us to come up with unique and creative ways to get in front of the end-user and pull it through the Cisco reseller channel.

### **CEOCFO: What types of problems would companies tend to turn to you to solve?**

**Mr. Ryan:** VistaPoint attendant consoles address the needs of Cisco VoIP customers who have specific call handling requirements for their receptionists, operators, and executive assistants. VistaPoint makes it possible for these users to quickly identify and answer incoming calls and locate the requested party while ascertaining their availability at that moment in time using presence and status. In some cases, our customers have deployed VistaPoint consoles in their contact centers to provide sales teams with a tool capable of processing calls, locating customer records, and redirecting calls as needed using presence and call control. When faced with specific challenges, these customers will locate us using the Web or through their Cisco reseller. Once they have sat through a web-based demo of VistaPoint, they can see where the product fits into their environment adding significant value to their Cisco VoIP solution.

### **CEOCFO: In the first scenario, why is the system not already doing that? What might you add to make that process easier at a fairly basic level?**

**Mr. Ryan:** Most VoIP systems offer a hardware-based console for operators to make use of and they serve a purpose. However, many organizations need much more than a handset with sidecars and turn to software-based consoles to meet their needs. VistaPoint was the first PC-based attendant console on the market and, over the years, has been continually refined to meet changes in technology and end-user needs. With customer service being paramount to a company's success, operators need as much information about the caller and the requested party as possible to deliver the very best is customer service. This is where third-party solutions such as VistaPoint come into play. VistaPoint consoles make it possible for the user to search multiple directories and quickly locate the communication devices for that person and also show their schedule and availability.

A software-based solution makes that possible, whereas, hardware-based consoles would have limitations dating to the time of manufacturing. It is for this reason that VistaPoint has been so successful and outlived many competitors. Keep in mind that you are looking at a software product that is now seventeen years in the communications market and still going strong.

### **CEOCFO: Has it become harder as people are using more and more devices? How do you integrate that into your offering?**

**Mr. Ryan:** It has been a challenge. At one time, an employee had just their desk phone. Now they are using multiple communication devices and although most VoIP systems support single-number dialing, there is still the need to identify

alternate numbers or contacts when processing calls. Corporate directories and databases provide this information. By offering a phonebook that connects to any combination of directories and data files, operators are able to locate these alternate numbers and contacts and deliver excellent customer service.

Another challenge has been actually monitoring multiple devices that a user is associated with. For example, an executive may have a phone on their desk, one on their conference table, a Jabber client, and possibly an IP Communicator (softphone) on their PC. By collectively monitoring all of these devices, we can show the console user when they are on a call or idle, regardless of what device they are using at the time.

**CEOCFO: *When someone comes to you, do they know what kind of solution they want or would you typically walk through it with a client to help find the best solution?***

**Mr. Ryan:** Generally speaking, they have a general idea of what they are looking for and what issues they must resolve. They just need to find the product that meets their specific requirements. Through web-based demos, customers can quickly identify a solution, and in many cases, discover other features and capabilities that would benefit their organization.

**CEOCFO: *How often do you win?***

**Mr. Ryan:** We have a high close ratio. I would say that once a customer sees what we are able to do, we have about a 90+ percent close ratio. Our resellers will bring us in on a deal when up against another VoIP manufacture. Once the customer sees how our software adds value to the overall Cisco solution the reseller wins. Solutions sell hardware!

**“Over the next few years we anticipate seeing client-based consoles fade away and the browser-based console take over and become the industry standard.” - Ray Ryan**

**CEOCFO: *What is it that you do better, faster, cheaper or easier that accounts for that success?***

**Mr. Ryan:** Customer service! We pride ourselves on delivering a quality product with exceptional customer support. On Cisco Marketplace, our customer reviews say it all. The fact that we have been at it longer than anyone else shows an ability and willingness to adjust to changes in technology and customer needs.

VistaPoint was first introduced at a telephony trade show in Anaheim, CA back in the 90's and drew a lot of attention from PBX manufacturers. Although it was a very basic PC-based attendant console, we knew we had something of value. Since then, we have continued to refine the product based on feedback from customers and changes in communication technologies. Console users regularly contact us and ask for an enhancement or suggest a better way to do something. We evaluate each request and if it makes sense, it is added to our roadmap for a future release. Staying ahead of the curve has permitted us to offer a superior product at a competitive price point. Our discounts allow resellers to profit on software and support contracts. Keep in mind that every console on the market today is a derivative of what we first introduced in Anaheim. While we are on the cutting edge, our competition is still trying to add some of the key functionality that we have had for several years.

**CEOCFO: *What is the business model?***

**Mr. Ryan:** We sell through the Cisco Reseller channel and direct to the end-user. Our preference is to sell through the channel. When a customer reaches out to us, we first identify their Cisco reseller. If their reseller is an authorized VistaPoint reseller, we get them engaged. If not we will reach out to their reseller to get them on-board. If that is not possible then we will sell directly to the end-user. For the most part, the resellers are coming directly to us. They have identified a customer that would benefit from our solution and will ask for a web-based demo. We do the demo, and they close the deal. The majority of our sales are through the channel.

**CEOCFO: *Is branding important?***

**Mr. Ryan:** We have recently done several major shows with our vendors as well as participating at Cisco Live. The majority of the people do not recognize iQ NetSolutions, they recognize us as VistaPoint. VistaPoint is well known. In fact, when we are introduced during webinars, the resellers will say they have VistaPoint on the line. They do not say they have iQ NetSolutions or Ray Ryan, but they say they have VistaPoint on the line. The majority of our resellers and our customers know us as VistaPoint, because VistaPoint has become synonymous with PC-based attendant consoles.

**CEOCFO: *If service is needed, does the reseller then troubleshoot? Does customer service go through you or is the reseller most of the time your customer?***

**Mr. Ryan:** The model today, which has been very successful for us, is for the customer to contact us directly. This eliminates the middleman (reseller). We know this is the reseller's customer, and we treat them as the reseller's customer. However, we want to make sure that any issue with VistaPoint is quickly resolved. In order to do that, we ask that the end user contact us directly, and there are several different ways they can do so 24/7. Once they have reached out to us, then someone on our support team will work directly with that end user. In some cases — very rarely — we have the reseller

come to us and engage us in an issue that a customer is having. Typically, the customer has already reached out to us directly.

**CEOCFO: *How do you provide that high level of customer service? Do people realize that going forward? Why is it exceptional?***

**Mr. Ryan:** I take customer service and support very personally. I have directed my entire staff to focus on customer service. From the time they lift a handset to take a call or open an email, they are to treat that person as our only customer. We have thousands of customers, but every customer to us is special. It does not matter how big or how small they are. I get anxious when we have service issues, so I oversee each until they are resolved. We continually ask our customers for feedback to verify that they are receiving the level of service they expect. I believe that our success directly correlates to how well we treat our customers.

**CEOCFO: *What is the competitive landscape? Are there many companies in your space that count?***

**Mr. Ryan:** We compete with a few currently. It is an interesting and challenging business. Over the years, we have seen many companies with similar products enter the space and then leave. They will spend a couple years trying to get a foothold and then just disappear. It could be that their price points are too low to sustain their business model, which can affect support and result in disappointing sales. Others have offered products that are overpriced or cannot scale to meet specific market requirements. Since our products are available worldwide, we are able to work with multi-national companies, which gives us a global advantage.

**CEOCFO: *Is there one method you have that you think people should be using more that has not been adopted yet?***

**Mr. Ryan:** Historically, the majority of the applications that are associated with attendant consoles have been client-server based, meaning it is an application installed on the operator's PC with a backend server. We do offer a stand-alone console (no server), but these have limitations, so for the most part there is a server. The down side of a client-installed application is maintenance and upgrades. At Cisco Live this year, we introduced a browser-based console that eliminates the need to touch the client PC. WebConsole is a browser-based console that runs on the VistaPoint server. Operators open a browser, log in with credentials, and launch their console. We see this as the future, because it eliminates the need to touch the operator's desktop, and upgrades are done in less than five minutes. You can imagine the savings when you can upgrade the server, reboot, and go home. You can see from an IT perspective how significant this is going to be as far as the saving of time, resources, and money from the IT department side, as well as just being able to facilitate upgrading the software. In early 2015, VistaPoint will be available to support cloud-based deployments for ISPs. This hybrid model will give us the flexibility to move from premise-based solutions to delivering software as a service (SaaS). Over the next few years we anticipate seeing client-based consoles fade away and the browser-based console take over and become the industry standard.

**CEOCFO: *What do you bring to the table from your military background?***

**Mr. Ryan:** I would say structure and being able to provide clear, concise direction to staff as well as our engineering teams. Also, being able to make and keep commitments. That is the biggest thing for me. It goes back to customer service. Customers buy from someone who they feel comfortable with and they feel the organization is going to be there for them and support them. That is something I feel is very important, that we meet our commitments to our customers.

**CEOCFO: *What surprised you over the years as the business has grown and developed?***

**Mr. Ryan:** How quickly things can change. From one day to another, whether it is a new product that is introduced or a new technology. In the past, we have developed software products for specific platforms only to have the manufacturer of the platform withdraw it from the market. We are dependent on the hardware that we integrate with. Any changes to their interface or availability can impact our ability to support their platform. With Cisco we are a Preferred Solution Partner and have access to APIs and beta software far in advance of release that allow us to remain ahead of the curve.

We continually keep our eye on the ball and ear to the track for any potential changes or opportunities that present themselves. Every morning when I get into the office, I am online looking, reading and checking out the latest news, latest blogs, and who is doing what. Acquisitions can very quickly change the whole landscape, and these events can affect dozens of companies. We create and deliver excellent products backed by exceptional service. This has been our model since day one and has really helped us to sustain our way of life and be successful.

**CEOCFO: *Why iQ NetSolutions?***

**Mr. Ryan:** I would say experience and our track record. We have a very robust suite of software products that we offer. Customers reach out to us to solve their problems, and with our expertise and understanding of our software and the Cisco platform, we are able to offer solutions. VistaPoint is able to provide the features and capabilities that they are looking for. Flexibility is another advantage that VistaPoint offers. Being extremely flexible, it lends itself to being able to go into a variety of vertical markets, whether it is a law firm, hospital or manufacturing facility. The software has been very flexible in being able to meet specific vertical market requirements.



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