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## Meeting Room = Waiting Room = ACD

**A brilliant use of a CPE conference server assigns "perpetual conferences" to projects, creating a virtual, project-specific waiting room.**

By Ellen Muraskin

09/04/2002, 9:15 PM ET

### THE PREMISES:

Datatec, Networking/IT Consultancy, Fairfield, NJ

### THE PROBLEMS:

High conferencing costs; bursts of incoming calls from reporting field service engineers.

### THE PAYBACK:

- Conferencing goes from 30 cents to four cents/port/minute
- ACD purchase plans bagged
- FSE's of each project can share information while waiting "on hold"

### THE PIECES:

Sonexis AudioCollaborator 24-port conferencing server, sitting on a LAN and behind a Mitel PBX.

### THE PLOT:

Datatec is an IT consultancy with a staff of over 400 field service technicians operating around the country, delivering and installing pre-integrated solutions for companies like Starbucks and Home Depot. They perform such projects as LAN installation, site powering and wiring, demarcation extension, and technical migrations, in chain outlets or other sites.

When technicians arrive at jobs and when they finish, they call in to Datatec's headquarters with project specifics, so that customers (and billing records) can be kept current. Naturally, these kinds of calls tend to bunch up around 9 a.m., and again at 9 a.m. Central, Mountain, and Pacific Time. Doug Kandel, IT Director at Datatec, decided to handle these peaks by fronting their Mitel PBX with an ACD. He also was looking for an alternative to Datatec's conferencing service, supplied by their LD carrier at 30 cents a minute per port.

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**Define It**

Kandel had noticed a writeup about Sonexis' (Boston, MA - 617-531-2100, [www.sonexis.com](http://www.sonexis.com)) AudioCollaborator in eWeek several months ago. A CPE conferencing server built out of a mid-range Windows 2000 server, T interface, internal web server, web- and IVR GUI and Pentium III processor, the product wasn't quite in production yet, so he took Sonexis up on the offer of serving as a beta site. Datatec's cost of audioconferencing immediately plunged from 30 to four cents a minute - their regular, negotiated 800-number LD rate with a three-year contract. Scheduling conferences was easier. And they no longer had to pay for cancelled conferences. These savings alone totaled about \$7,000 per month. Audio quality took no hit compared with the carrier service, says Kandel.

AudioCollaborator, a 1U box, works with a web interface, so that anyone with PIN clearance can invite participants (and mute them), and can admit those who dial in. An IVR welcomes attendees, new arrivals are announced, and all those in the "room" are visible on the web screen. Sidebar conferences are a matter of a few clicks. All web commands are duplicated in IVR as well.

Here comes the creative part: AudioCollaborator not only solves Datatec's conferencing expense problem, it solves the small-scale ACD problem as well. The end user assigns a "perpetual conference," and with that, a conference ID number, to every project out in the field. So all the techs working on updating the point-of-sale terminals at various Starbucks, say, find themselves dialing into the same conference. The project coordinator at Datatec, also assigned to that ID, picks each caller up out of the conference on his web interface, in order of appearance, and takes him into a sidebar "room" to have the one-on-one that gets the information.

Now Kandel has taken the "room" metaphor one step further: He unmutes all the technicians waiting in the main conference, so its as if they shared a real waiting room. Technicians can trade tips and answer each other's questions; worst case, they can talk sports. Either way, it builds camaraderie and, in Kandel's words, "It's a much better use of on-hold time than bad music."

If Datatec wants to bill back clients for conferencing minutes, this is something they are newly equipped to do, as well, since conferences are assigned to projects.

Datatec is expanding its current AudioCollaborator from 24 ports (around \$28,000 retail) to 48. (There's an H.323 model or a software migration to VoIP PBXs as well, supporting 30 to 120 connections.) Sonexis' GA release accommodates customized greetings and web logos.





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