

Technology Showcase: VoIP

Debbie Lambert, Founder and Managing Partner
Johnson Lambert & Co., LLP

Welcome to the mindSHIFT Technology Showcase. We're talking to Johnson Lambert & Co. to see how they are using Voice over IP (VoIP) to their strategic advantage.

- mindSHIFT:** To start, Debbie, could you tell listeners who you are and what you do?
- Debbie Lambert:** I am Debbie Lambert, the managing partner of Johnson Lambert & Co. We're a CPA firm that has six offices, all located in the East Coast, from Burlington, Vermont, in the north down to Jacksonville, Florida, in the south. Our primary services are financial statement audit services and tax services.
- mindSHIFT:** Can you give us a snapshot of how you're using voice over IP in your business?
- Debbie Lambert:** Yes. We're all about client service, and communication is key to what we do. We are a very mobile work force. The voice over IP has been huge for us, giving our work force the option of using their voice over IPs and an Internet connection, as opposed to their cell phone or something else.
- mindSHIFT:** Looking back, before you implemented VoIP, what did you specifically need in the way of service?
- Debbie Lambert:** I guess one of the things about having six offices up and down the East Coast, is we really like to think of ourselves as one organization and one group that's just separated by the little bit bigger space than the office down the hall. But we want to feel very much like one organization. I think VoIP has really helped us in the sense of being able to make us feel like we're connected, that we're one organization, that we're really one team.
- mindSHIFT:** How has that impacted your business, overall?
- Debbie Lambert:** Clearly, VoIP makes us better able to feel like one team. When you're in a client service environment, being able to handle a lot and to multi-task is really, really important to feeling satisfied and efficient about what you're doing. That leads, in the long-term, to retention of employees. Externally, clearly clients these days want you to respond pretty quickly. When they want to reach you, they want to reach you. Clearly, VoIP has helped us be more responsive to our clients.
- mindSHIFT:** From your point of view, how did we approach solving your problems?
- Debbie Lambert:** IT is not my area. It's hard to know what you don't know. One of the things I've loved about mindSHIFT from the get-go was they kind of present a menu or a way of doing things that then you could ask about. mindSHIFT provides thought leadership as well as a way then of executing that plan that we really were not able to muster up internally.
- mindSHIFT:** How fast do you feel you got up to speed in using the VoIP technology?
- Debbie Lambert:** It's very easy, it's very intuitive. If you've used a business phone before, it's easy to do. The thing that everybody loved was the way the VoIP is so integrated with the IT and the voicemail messages being in our email, because we're a very mobile work force. That's the thing our employees loved the most about it.
- mindSHIFT:** Can you see any specific hard dollar return on investment for VoIP?
- Debbie Lambert:** I don't have the specific dollars in front of me, but it was material, it was significant. I would put it in the category of astonishing. It was honestly remarkable.
- mindSHIFT:** Can you see any other overall opportunity gains that this change in technology has created for you?
- Debbie Lambert:** The actual administration of this VoIP is much, much easier than what we were trying to maintain and administer on our phone system previously. So that was, for us, a huge benefit, in that we want to be about the business of doing business, of dealing externally with our customers -- not trying to figure out how do we get this extension changed or how do we add this new person or how do we do this. That piece of it has been just huge.

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We run pretty lean administratively, and I wanted to make sure that we are able to spend our time looking outward, either serving our clients or looking for business opportunities or dealing with strategy, not dealing with how the phones work. A real strategic advantage for us is that our time is not taken up trying to deal with the guts of how a phone system works. With this VoIP, and VoIP managed by mindSHIFT, it's been just very very easy for us to do what we do.

mindSHIFT:

Can you quantify what that means to the business?

Debbie Lambert:

I think the real difference is at the senior management level, in terms of the time available. In my own time, I would guess that there's probably, maybe in the course of a year, 80 to 100 hours that I don't have to spend on internal matters that relate to the phone.

mindSHIFT:

That's quite a savings. At your billing rate, that works out to a savings of \$26,000 to \$35,000 each year in your time alone!

Debbie Lambert:

Yes. And I would say sometimes it's even more, what I would call in the price list category, because some of that time also is time that is spent that is even more leverage-able than that, just because it's time that is spent perhaps creating or developing a new relationship or a new visibility for the firm that would have been spent in the back office trying to deal with the phone vendor before.

mindSHIFT:

Did you have any doubts about how the technology might solve your problems as you were looking at VoIP?

Debbie Lambert:

No. I had done some homework. I wanted to make sure we weren't too much on the "bleeding edge" of something, but I was pretty comfortable that it was going to make sense to go to VoIP.

mindSHIFT:

Why did you buy from mindSHIFT, ultimately?

Debbie Lambert:

Two things were very attractive to me. Clearly, one is cost, and the cost effectiveness. I thought it was a cost effective alternative, but I thought even more so than just the pure cost was the ability to manage the IT costs. It gives you more control and ability to plan. I've always thought of IT as, this black hole -- it just spends money and spends money. And [now] our costs are much more predictable, controllable, manageable on the mindSHIFT model.

I think the second thing was we are able to get capabilities, both technologies and technical capabilities of people, that we weren't able to do in an organization our size by ourselves. We're able to take advantage of a level of sophistication of this technology and VoIP that we would not be able to get if we each went out and did it individually.

mindSHIFT:

What are we like as people to work with?

Debbie Lambert:

You've delivered what you promised. I would say I trust you guys. You guys have earned my trust. What you say you're going to do, you're going to do. If you say you can't do that or it won't work, or that doesn't make sense... I have confidence in the advice that I get out of you all as well.

mindSHIFT:

Is there anything else you think people should know about working with mindSHIFT?

Debbie Lambert:

I thought outsourcing was an all or nothing proposition. I think it strikes a really nice balance there, that I probably didn't think was out there, or never envisioned was out there when we first went out looking for how to attack our IT challenges.

I used to view technology as one of those necessary evils. And now, I really view technology -- when I say technology, I'm talking technology and VoIP -- for me, that's all become kind of one arena now. Now that they all plug into the same place in the wall, that's one arena to me. I really think of that as a strategic advantage of our organization.

Thanks a lot, Debbie. This concludes our discussion with Debbie Lambert, Founder and Managing Partner of Johnson Lambert & Co., a CPA firm which is using VoIP from mindSHIFT to its strategic advantage.

You can find out more about mindSHIFT VoIP and managed IT services by calling us toll-free at 877-227-5054. Or you can email us at info@mindSHIFT.com.

Thank you for listening, and have a great day!