

The Necessity of Unified Communication

Company Background

The Town of Windsor is situated in the heart of the Central Northern Colorado Tri-Cities, nestled between Fort Collins, Loveland and Greeley. Settled by German immigrants who farmed sugar beets, Windsor incorporated in 1890 after the Greeley and Salt Lake Pacific laid 85 miles of railroad to transport crops. While agriculture has traditionally fueled the livelihood of this community, the town experienced rapid urban growth over the last two decades, due primarily to its central location and proximity to Interstate 25.

Population estimates for the years 2000-2008 indicate the town nearly doubled in size and is home to approximately 19,000 residents. The town also experienced significant business growth, including the addition of several new restaurants, specialty shops, coffeehouses and upscale retail downtown.

On May 22, 2008, an EF3 tornado devastated Windsor and many areas of Weld County and Larimer County, killing one and injuring 100 other people in its wake. The tornado was preceded by golf-ball-size hail and torrential winds which knocked over 15 railroad cars, vehicles and semi trucks. Prior to this day, the town had experienced several tornadoes, but never of this magnitude.

The tornado obliterated telephone communications and for two days Town of Windsor city officials relied on word of mouth and cellular service to communicate with its constituents and the world at large. While plans were in motion to update the town's telephone system prior to the tornado, this natural disaster further underscored the importance of having a reliable phone system in place to maintain communications in times of great peril.

Foresight Proves Hindsight

The Town of Windsor maintains three city buildings that house several public departments, city resources, and town operations. A central hub of information for residents, visitors and businesses, the Town of Windsor employs 100 employees who spend an average of 2 hours on the phone each day fielding questions and conducting business on behalf of the town.

As more staff and departments were added, the town's aging, 10-year-old phone system buckled under pressure and could not properly support the pace of business. In late 2007, Dean Moyer, director of finance for the Town of Windsor, assumed responsibility for IT operations. One of his top priorities was to replace the antiquated phone system and re-assign third-party phone management responsibility to his internal LAN/WAN Systems Administrator Brian Nguyen.

"Given that 80 percent of our technical infrastructure is Cisco-based, Brian was interested in Cisco's Unified Communications system because he realized the business capabilities and long-term value it would afford our town," said Moyer.

In early 2008, budget was allocated for the Unified Communications migration, but plans came to a halt in May when Windsor was hit by the most devastating tornado in the town's history. During the tornado, all three city buildings lost phone communications. Desperate to re-establish the phone lines, Nguyen called the town's telecommunications vendor, a third-party contractor, but he was out of town and could not respond in a timely fashion. After two days, Moyer and his team were able to get the phone network back online, but the tornado further emphasized the importance of a reliable phone system.



“Making a call is considered a trivial act in everyday life, but in times of disaster, it becomes a precious lifeline,” said Moyer. “We experienced firsthand what it was like to have that lifeline taken away and from that day forward we vowed to take the necessary measures to ensure that never happened again.”

Re-building after the tornado required unplanned time and money, so the town temporarily halted plans to update the phone system. In August 2008, Cisco Systems donated the routers and switches used during the Democratic National Convention to the Town of Windsor. This donation, estimated at more than \$67,000, reduced the upfront capital necessary to migrate to a Unified Communications system and gave city officials the financial jumpstart to put the project back on track.

The Town of Windsor contracted Denver-based 3t Systems, Inc. to assist with the Unified Communications project. 3t Systems engineers met with Moyer and Nguyen to better understand the town’s departmental structure, direct dial allocations, phone tree structure and goals for voice and data network integration.

As a Cisco Systems Premier Certified Partner, 3t Systems had the installation track record, business acumen and Unified Communications accreditations necessary to spearhead this project. “I was leery at first because I have yet to have one software conversion go smoothly,” said Moyer. “But, 3t Systems proved me wrong. This was by far the smoothest, fastest and easiest conversion I had ever managed.”

To minimize interruption, 3t Systems completed most of the network configuration remotely and installed 80 Cisco handsets and trained employees in less than four days. By integrating voice and data onto a shared IP network, the Town of Windsor put in place a robust solution that provides the functionality, scalability, security and network safeguards to ensure communications is never compromised – even during EF3 tornados.

In addition to peace of mind, other Unified Communications benefits include:

- Reconciling employee MAC (Move, Add, Change) requests on-demand with minimal office interruption.
- Replacing costly hard-wire system configurations with software system updates.
- Increasing employee efficiency through advanced functions, such as automatic call forwarding, meeting express, email/voicemail Outlook message management, online directories and conference call support.
- Integrating Cisco Unified Communications with other applications to enable workers to collaborate in real time using their preferred tools and software.

Investing in the Future Today

Looking ahead, the Town of Windsor has several initiatives in motion to re-build the town and position it for continued growth. While the Town of Windsor may be one of the oldest municipalities in Colorado, it is taking tremendous strides to integrate state of the art technologies into its development and renovation plans to keep the town and its people on the leading edge of technical excellence.

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case study