

Case Study

City of Minneapolis

Minneapolis, Minn. is known for its progressive public social programs – the public park systems for many U.S. cities are modeled after Minneapolis, where a park is within a half mile of every home. Following in this progressive tradition, city officials have pioneered the implementation of a new and innovative telecommunications network for city employees that provides access for citizens to government services and information through a single 311 number to resolve issues from potholes to animal control to information on park amenities.

Summary

Features of the network, based on HiPath® solution and service portfolio, facilitate the city's 5,500 employees' efforts to more effectively manage an increasing 311 call volume, with the added capability to provide overflow integration of 911 calls to the 311 contact center in the event of a city-wide emergency or natural disaster.

Challenges

- Need to streamline administration through the consolidation of 15 small contact centers and 35 locations with varying levels of service and technology to a single PBX platform
- Desire to simplify citizen access to government services through a single 311 number
- The requirement to ensure business continuity through a more flexible telecommunications infrastructure in the 311 call center capable of providing overflow integration between 911 calls and the 311 Center

- The need to reduce the number of non-emergency calls to 911 contact center personnel
- Need for more centralized application administration
- Minimize impact to city services during switchover

The Technology Behind the Solution

- HiPath 4000 Real-Time IP System
- HiPath Xpressions®
- HiPath ProCenter® Enterprise
- optiPoint® 420 IP phones
- optiPoint 500 digital phones

Top Benefits

- More simplified and more responsive citizen access to information and interaction with city government services through a single number, 311, for non-emergencies

- More flexible and redundant communications infrastructure that offers business continuity and helps to increase effectiveness of 911 emergency call services in the event of a city-wide emergency or natural disaster by diverting excess 911 calls to the city's 311 contact center resources
- Consolidation of multiple small contact centers and remote systems to a single PBX platform in an effort to reduce operating costs and improve administrative capabilities
- More efficient use of 911 contact center resources with the reduction of non-emergency calls to the number since the introduction of 311
- Enhanced employee productivity through availability of new features, such as caller ID, skills-based routing, agent presence, real-time collaboration and the potential of unified messaging
- Helps to minimize impact to city services during the transition to the new system

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Connie Perila

Manager of Telecommunications and Network Services
City of Minneapolis

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Minneapolis, the City of Lakes, is known for its progressive attitude towards city and social services. With a growing population of 380,000, city officials have been working to establish a telecommunications infrastructure that addresses current problems, positions the city for growth and helps to simplify the way citizens access information and interact with city government.

The city has 5,500 employees with approximately 3,500 phones distributed between the downtown offices, precincts and public works locations. The city's legacy communications network was purchased in 1989 with an expected shelf life of eight years. In pushing that life to 16 years, the city was experiencing increasing costs for maintenance and service of antiquated equipment.

Transforming city communications

In an effort to simplify citizen access to government services, enhance 911 call effectiveness and streamline existing operations, the City of Minneapolis' Telecommunications and Network Services Division investigated and deployed HiPath 4000 and optiPoint IP telephones with local Siemens channel partner, Black Box Network Services. Minneapolis had previously enjoyed an extended relationship with Black Box, and expectations were set for continued levels of quality service. The proposed system featured intelligent routing that facilitates faster access to skilled resources with the goals of providing higher levels of service, greater first contact resolution and more simplified application administration.

These offerings are part of Siemens' LifeWorks® vision of unified communication and collaboration – a strategic effort that the company calls “open communications.” The ability to provide open communications solutions is based on several key technology and business goals: to allow employees to communicate and collaborate regardless

of the device, network or IT environment they're using; to provide organizations more flexibility in moving to an open communications environment; to provide solutions that can be integrated into business processes; and to provide solutions that are more intuitive and more easy-to-use.

Siemens' OpenPath™ rollout strategy provides a more logical transition for organizations like the City of Minneapolis in their efforts to transform their communications infrastructure at their own pace. Siemens was able to make the transition from old system to new while maintaining existing call features and functionality and adding new capabilities that required minimal training for the city's staff. In short, the Siemens platform provided the city with a scalable and more flexible solution that enabled them to implement and more easily manage the 311 solution with the added capability to utilize the 311 contact center's resources to handle overflow integration from the 911 system.

Addressing city needs

Effectively directing non-emergency calls is a challenge for contact centers. Being able to locate correct contacts and resolve issues in a timely manner is significant and requires a more flexible and expandable telecommunications platform that is easier to manage. “311 is a huge initiative for us, and we needed to implement new, emerging technology for that to be successful,” said Connie Perila, Manager of Telecommunications and Network Services, City of Minneapolis.

Up to 60 percent of all 911 calls are non-emergency. With a 311 calling option, 911 can be utilized for emergency calls. Minneapolis' solution distributes voice interactions to agent resources more efficiently. Using the 311 calling and email options, residents can report anything from noise complaints, to missing traffic signs, to graffiti, to low water pressure.

In addition, citizens can more easily access government information on business or building services, visitor resources and snow removal.

According to Perila, “There are significant benefits of the 311 Siemens solution provided by Black Box. Citizen access to city services and our ability to more effectively deal with city-wide information calls and maintain business continuity have improved noticeably. Siemens' solutions have also facilitated our efforts to manage key information, track calls and provide services via voice, email and the Web. All of the technology we've added has helped to make 311 successful.”

Minneapolis officials worked with Siemens and Black Box to plan, design and cutover to the new system. Because of the need to maintain key city services, the transition had to be completed with minimal disruption to the city's communications infrastructure. The implementation was completed quickly, changing out the city's 3,000 downtown office phones in one weekend. The remaining 500 remote office phones were cutover during a series of weekends over a period of six months.

The project was implemented under the direction of the city's telecommunications manager but was overseen by two project managers – one from Black Box with a focus on telecommunications design, implementation and support and one from rClient, a local firm specializing in critical project management for information technologies.

“It was an enormous undertaking for Black Box, rClient and the city,” says Perila. “Without the first-class expertise we received, as well as the versatility of Siemens' 'open communications' solutions, this implementation may have gone very differently in terms of our ability to upgrade our infrastructure without significant disruption to the city's communications.”

Enhanced communications bring results

While single number 311 access was a major motivation for upgrading the city's communications network, it was only one of several benefits. Other payoffs include facilitating higher employee productivity and satisfaction, simplified application administration through centralization, and lower maintenance and service costs. In addition to this, the new system offers city officials and employees enhanced phone and calling features that have facilitated improved internal and external communications.

The 35 physical locations and 15 separate small contact centers on the City's telecom network created an important need to centralize telecom network application administration. The HiPath 4000 offered the city a scalable and more fault-tolerant infrastructure that consolidates the various systems to one PBX platform for management and administration with more comprehensive monitoring and reporting.

Employees may experience improvements in productivity with the enhanced optiPoint features, intelligent routing and more extensive performance reporting. Features like caller ID, as well as collaboration tools such as forwarding and conferencing available from any phone in the network, help to expedite issue resolution.

HiPath ProCenter Enterprise provides agents with presence and status information at their desktop. With the ability to see the availability of resources in the center, they may be able to more quickly connect citizens with the right resources.

HiPath Xpressions extends secure employee connectivity and helps to increase productivity by providing remote/anywhere access through a single number. Unified messaging – the ability to collect incoming communications, whether fax, email, voice mail or SMS

Siemens Communications, a wholly owned subsidiary of Siemens with more than 15,000 employees, is one of the world's leading vendors of Open Communications solutions for enterprises of all sizes. Our products, solutions and services make business processes more productive, faster and more secure – with any device, network or IT infrastructure.

text – is expected to be deployed with Siemens HiPath Xpressions pending the upgrade of the city's Microsoft Exchange system.

The solution also helped to reduce the city's maintenance and servicing costs. "With the new HiPath 4000 and optiPoint handsets, we were able to dispose of old equipment that expended considerable human and financial resources," says Perila. "We're now able to better allocate our resources in an effort to improve services to citizens and city employees."

Contact center operations also improved noticeably. According to Perila, "With our old system, we were experiencing up to 1,400 abandoned calls on a daily basis. Now, 90 percent of all calls are answered within 20 seconds and this means we are in a better position to serve the needs of our citizens."

"In 2006, the 311 Center handled 343,000 calls. We saw an increase from 18,000 to 35,000 calls per month during that first year," says Perila. "Our old system was not robust enough to handle that kind of volume. This increased capability is important to the city on a daily basis, but it is absolutely imperative in the event of a disaster or city-wide emergency such as the bridge collapse that took place in Minneapolis on August 1, 2007. The city is exploring options for handing additional calls from other service departments and potentially for surrounding communities."

Most notably, Minneapolis' 311 solution has helped to increase service levels and improve citizen interaction with city government. With the Siemens platform and handsets, combined with applications for intelligent routing, the potential of unified messaging and mobile forwarding, Minneapolis has been able to create an open and more flexible communications solution with enhanced 311 capabilities that many other cities may seek to emulate.

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