Case Study

\Orchestrating a brighter world NEC

Springfield Utility Board

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Customer

- Springfield Utility Board

Industry

- Electrical Power, Water, and Telecom Provider

Challenges

- Existing system past end of life/ support, unable to scale
- Required more flexibility and enhanced capabilities
- Limitations and high maintenance of wire phone system

Solution

- Virtualized UNIVERGE SV9500 platform
- Express5800 Fault Tolerant Server
- UG50 gateway, with Survivability Remote Node, and MG-SIP
- UC for Enterprise (UCE) applications
- New DT820 IP Desktop phones with color, built-in Gb (Gigabit)
- UM8700 Unified Messaging system
- MLC Mobile Client
- UCE Contact Center Suite of applications

Results

- Successfully tested Disaster Recovery
- Improved Customer Service with enhanced routing, tools, and metrics
- Simplified IT administration of flexible, scalable, virtual solution
- Mobility option for offsite field engineers

Operating for more than 50 years, this citizen-owned public utility provides electricity, water, and telecom for Springfield, Oregon, a picturesque river city in a forested region surrounded by mountains, located near Eugene, Oregon. Springfield Utility Board (SUB) is the provider for a community of more than 60,000 users in a city that is also the home of the two regional hospitals.

Bob Fondren, MIS Director, explained, “Our mission is to provide reliable, cost effective power, water and telecom for the citizens of Springfield and the surrounding area, and for that we have approximately 140 employees at three locations.” The three main SUB sites are the Water Service Center, Electric Service Center, and SUB’s Administration building—which also has lobby staff to help walk-in customers and houses the Customer Service Call Center and IT Department.

As a municipal utility entity, SUB operates under the city Charter and is governed by Springfield Utility Board’s five elected Board of Directors.

> “In the end, protecting our system is all about customer service.”

Challenges

Robb Franklin, SUB Network Engineer, explained, “Our existing NEC system had long reached its end of life and product support. Although it was still running flawlessly, we wanted to expand some of our capabilities and couldn’t, because it was no longer a supported product. The other driving factor was our wanting to move away from a hard-wired system to IP-based telephony for more flexibility on where we could put phones, and to simplify the overall system maintenance.”

"The system installation was flawless. It was one of those installations where nobody knew it happened, except they had a new phone on their desk--and the system's cutover was fabulous."

Lack of mobility and challenges with connectivity and internal collaboration were becoming pressing issues. With the existing hard-wired system, moving phones could be problematic—like the labor intensive placing of a new phone in a conference room. Some offsite locations were without any hard-wired connectivity to the phone system, such as multiple utility substations. Reaching engineers and others in the field could be difficult, as these workers' mobility options were to use their cellphones. The existing out-of-date system also did not allow for the Contact Center to have Instant Messaging or the many other modern options for team collaboration.

> "One of the enhancements we've appreciated is the redundancy, and it worked really, really well; with one location going down we were still able to keep our "outage folks" going, which was huge for us."

Customer Service is the heart of SUB's relationship with their customers, and an upgrade to the best possible system could provide call center staff with better, more high efficiency tools for the job, and give SUB the opportunity to grow the department. As Robb Franklin explained, "We wanted to expand the number of seats in our contact center in the main office, and to eventually include our other locations. Because our system was past end of life, there was no way to add licenses to expand."

With no backup phone system in place for this utility provider, a reliable, disaster-proof communication solution had also become an essential.

Solution

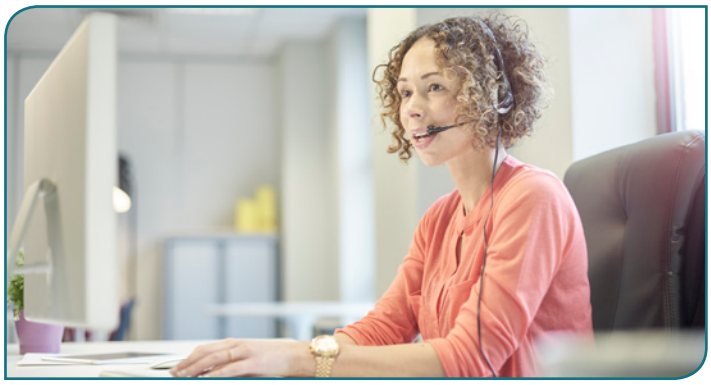
SUB's staff knew that migrating to a state-of-the-art virtual system and moving to IP-based telephony would be a big step. However, after considering both the results of extensive industry research and its strong, established relationship with NEC, SUB decided to take the digital leap with NEC's "Smart Enterprise" integrated approach.

"We did an exhaustive search," said Bob Fondren. "Our IT team looked at all the systems they could find, examined all the features, even contacted other customers for their experiences, and it was clear that NEC had the type of system we needed for the best Call Center situation. There wasn't any other system that was close. Already having a long history with NEC, we knew that what we were getting was true. At that point we identified NEC as having the best solution, and the Board decided to award the contract."

Springfield Utility Board's new high availability UC solution includes: NEC's software-based, virtualized UNIVERGE SV9500 communications platform deployed on an Express5800 Fault Tolerant (FT) server, with modular hardware redundancy for reliable disaster recovery and a Survivability Remote (SR) node located offsite at the SUB Electric Center. "In the end," said Director Bob Fondren, "protecting our system is all about customer service."

The new solution utilizes the UM8700, one of the most flexible Unified Messaging (UM) systems available, which also automatically integrates with UC for Enterprise, so users never miss an important message. The UM8700 architecture offers the functionality of accessing your e-mails and voicemail in one inbox, and message retrieval from any device (phone, computer or mobile device).

Welcome additions to the new phone system were the 100 new DT820 IP desktop phones, complete with color and built in Gigabit capacity. Prior to the cutover, users received advanced training and the new DT820 units were placed throughout the SUB call center, allowing the team to become comfortable with their new desktops. Following the cutover--in addition



to having the DT820 phones live, and all their new UC for Contact Center applications, the virtual system allowed reps to answer calls from their computers without reaching for their phones.

SUB's new UC for Enterprise (UCE) applications enable enhanced internal and external connectivity, mobility and collaboration, and NEC specifically designed the UCE Contact Center Suite of applications to increase agent productivity and efficiency. SUB's new UC Interactive Voice Response (IVR) is a software-based contact center solution that provides advanced call routing, multilevel/multilingual auto-attendant and recorded pre-call customized announcement capabilities, and integrates seamlessly with UC Agent desktop client and the latest Global Navigator (GNAV) Pro management information system. These customer-focused applications provide SUB staff with cutting-edge tools to handle their workload, and give their customers control of their own Customer Service call experiences.

Global Navigator Pro is an enhanced management tool specifically designed for contact center managers and supervisors. It records call activity, tracks agent performance, and offers 90+ standard reports. With this integration, GNAV's split, team, agent and admin group views also display information in real-time, enabling supervisors to view every aspect of their contact center.

Robb Franklin explained, "We didn't change out the Call Center, just improved it and brought it up to date; UC Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) brings better control and management of the splits, and the enhancements in GNAV Pro gave us smarter ways to work, and better reporting."

On network changes, continued Franklin, "Working closely with our NEC partners, we pretty much gutted and reinstalled our network switching infrastructure, replacing cable in some areas, and changing out all our switches with those having POE (Power over Ethernet) capability. The final cutover was beautiful."

Fondren confirmed, "The system installation was flawless. It was one of those installations where nobody knew it happened, except they had a new phone on their desk--and the system's cutover was fabulous."

"Because we had advanced training from NEC", recalled Customer Service Supervisor, Valerie Shuck, "the day of the cutover was just like any other day—actually, it was so seamless that there were no problems for the Call Center, so I really cannot remember that day."

Results

During SUB's initial research and planning stage, NEC consultants recommended inclusion of a redundant disaster recovery aspect to the migration —as a precaution. Although SUB regularly conducts mini-disaster drills, very soon after the cutover they experienced a critical system test caused by the worst area snowstorm in 50 years. Snow weighed down trees, which took down the power lines, leaving approximately 15,000 people totally without power in freezing temperatures.

"We lost our own main office," said Robb Franklin, "so we lost the core PBX itself, but since we now have the survivability (SR) node at our Electric Service Center, it kept the phones there running so customers could call in and reach us. It was a live, real-world application."

Sharing the disaster's impact on the system's primary end-users, Customer Service, Valerie Shuck recalled, "On an average day our reps handle about 80 calls per day. Recently, when we experienced the extreme "Snow-pocalypse", our own power went down, but our phones stayed up. We lost our computers, so we hand-wrote customers' addresses, who were still able to get through to us; it was really great."

Bob Fondren stated, "One of the enhancements we've appreciated is the redundancy, and it worked really, really well; with one location going down we were still able to keep our "outage folks" going, which was huge for us."

Now equipped with enhanced work tools, the team's efficiency with their daily customer service workload has improved, and call management is much easier since deployment of the new system. Valerie Shuck confirmed the importance, stating, "NEC's products support our mission--to help our customers -- by giving us critical information quickly

and efficiently. Our staff can see when coworkers are available when a customer calls, and, if needed, who is available in different departments."

Shuck continued, "The Auto Attendant feature is new for us, and has been especially great for our customer service reps in the lobby who also handle calls. Since callers can now self-direct, our repeat callers making monthly payments can easily just proceed through the menu. This is cutting down on lobby visitors being interrupted by a caller.

"Our teams really like the internal Messaging. They also like the Caller ID feature, and being able to Save and Label that number—just in case we lose a call. When they call back, we can recognize and grab that call, and continue without needing to have the customer start over."

With new Call Recording and GNAV Pro features, Customer Service found that having their calls recorded, with metrics for calls, has helped them provide better service. "We like our calls to be recorded so they can be reviewed," said Shuck, "to make sure we're handling accounts correctly. I really enjoy that looking for a call is so much easier now, because I can search by date, filter by reps, search by phone number—so much faster now.

"GNAV is amazing. We love GNAV. Reports can be scheduled to be auto-generated each month to help with scheduling and coaching, and we like that a supervisor can have statistics on how long tasks take, which helps with planning and training. Being able to learn and work with all the features of GNAV is really exciting, and seeing all that it can do."

The SUB network engineers have found that the flexibility of the new telephony system means an easily scalable network, allowing them to install phones in 10 remote substations that previously lacked networked communications.

Bob Fondren concluded with, "The biggest value we see from NEC is that it just RUNS, and it runs every day. Our employees love the system, and that's what I want—I want happy people, who are happy with the tools they're using."

NEC's Relationship with Our Customer

Springfield Utility Board's trust in NEC is based on their positive customer experience spanning more than two decades—in fact, to date, SUB has never had a major phone system failure. Their decision to continue with NEC on this journey of complete system migration to a virtual IT platform--with NEC Fault Tolerant server, enhanced UCE capabilities, remote disaster recovery, and so much more--was easier because of product quality and ongoing support they had already experienced as long-time NEC customers.

"We've had fantastic support from NEC," said Robb Franklin. "We reported a bug, and NEC had their developers write a new software patch and handed it to us in less than an hour! They just said, 'Here you go.' We receive brilliant NEC support. I'm a real advocate for NEC, and I'm always happy to talk with colleagues about what a robust, integrated, scalable, and reliable product it is for us."

Franklin continued, "I was surprised to learn that NEC does so much more than phones. I've been so happy through the years with the reliability of their communication systems, but--and this was eye-opening for me--they do everything related to IT technology; platforms, servers, big data storage, networks, and more. The rock solid performance of products I've had in the past has made me want to explore NEC in all areas they provide solutions for."

Mr. Fondren concluded, "I've been at Springfield Utility Board for 19 years now, and I can say that NEC always resolved any issues very quickly. Instances where we needed Specialists, NEC brought them in, and took care of it. When we've called on the 'NEC big guns', we received a phone call right back, and were just amazed that a company that size was so responsive.

"Our experience with NEC and their partners has been excellent. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to say how happy we are."

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