

SUMMIT COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH



CASE STUDY

SWITCHVOX

More than 540,000 residents depend on services and programs provided by Ohio's Summit County Public Health (SCPH). Following its consolidation with the city of Akron's Health Department and the health services division of the City of Barberton, the conglomerate now provides a broader platform for environmental and community health education programs; clinical and medical advisory support services; and direct and coordinated school health services. Implementing a flexible and affordable telecommunications solution quickly became a vital need for the newly integrated SCPH.

A Flexible UC Solution: Switchvox Exceeds Expectations for a Public Health Organization with Expanding Facilities and Services

Prior to the consolidation, SCPH employed about 130 workers consisting of a single administrative facility, two health clinics, and a garage for mosquito control. After the two-city addition, the number of employees more than doubled to 265, while their four locations quickly multiplied into eleven facilities.

According to Cory Kendrick, IT and telecommunications manager for SCPH, each of the three individual entities had been operating their own legacy telecommunications system. SCPH's end-of-life Nortel was grossly insufficient for their internal needs, while Akron and Barberton were both running analog PBXs. "Not only were internal communications awkward and inefficient, but it became difficult to communicate effectively between multiple administrative facilities, satellite offices, and the countywide clinics," Kendrick says.

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Communications is key to SCPH serving its citizens and they were struggling to meet the challenges resulting from the consolidation — not only were there more physical locations to oversee but also more programs to manage and more clients to serve. SCPH expanded the range of basic and critical care services to residents as a result of the consolidation, including statewide access to certified birth certificates and certified death records in Summit County, OH; and numerous medical, prenatal, nutritional, and dental services, such as vaccinations to children and families. SCPH is also primarily responsible for the prevention and control of infectious disease throughout their communities and for promoting emergency preparedness programs in coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Red Cross.

Managing the larger workforce, expanded number of facilities, and keeping up with the organization's growing services and programs meant the IT department was under growing pressure to find a solution.

"Even if the consolidation hadn't happened, we already knew we were facing a problem with the phone system," Kendrick admits. "When the consolidation happened, it brought the phone system issues to the forefront. Kendrick knew just where to go to formulate a plan.

While employed with a smaller county agency a couple of years prior, Kendrick had worked with Tim May, the sales manager at N2Net in Cleveland, to install a highly flexible IP telecom solution and Unified Communications (UC) platform called Switchvox, from Digium. N2Net had implemented Switchvox for 100 users before, so Kendrick knew Switchvox would increase productivity and profitability utilizing voice-over IP (VoIP), at an attractive price. Furthermore, Kendrick knew what Switchvox could do for one hundred users, and felt a more powerful version could easily handle three hundred or more users. Kendrick solicited an evaluation from N2Net for a solution utilizing VoIP.

The Challenges

Without a firm budget, pricing a new telephony solution had its challenges. "One of the reasons the telecom project had been put off before was due to preliminary quotes from various providers for almost \$300,000," Kendrick explains. "The management team was trying to figure out how we could install and implement a system in phases. No one was enthusiastic about this option. After meeting to determine the agency's specific requirements, N2Net recommended Digium Switchvox for functionality, an alternative that offered significantly less upfront cost, with the potential for reoccurring savings. The Board of Health supported the decision to pursue the Switchvox alternative."

The entire Switchvox solution would cost about 30% of the costs of other systems, including installation and set-up at all eleven locations. If the significance of the savings sounded too good to be true, it got better when Kendrick also showed the Health Department an estimated 5% in additional savings resulting from the elimination of re-occurring costs and connectivity.

Summit County's Stow office and Akron's Morley Center were the two biggest facilities having the most employees. Both were operating analog PBX switchboards answered by receptionists who transferred calls to extensions using either direct inward dialing (DID) or a 4-digit extension. The smaller Barberton location had an analog PBX, which was maintained by the City and was not compatible with our systems.

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Because Akron and Summit County offered such a widespread range of services, it could be confusing for callers. For example, callers seeking information about vaccinations or the Pink Ribbon Project for breast and cervical cancer screenings may have been directed to hang up and call another number. Since the various systems were not connected, there was no good way to transfer callers from one location to another. Kendrick had to identify a business phone system that was flexible enough to handle complicated call routing rules that took away the aggravation for both employees and the public they serviced. Switchvox showed promise.

The Switchvox Solution

N2Net has been a Digium preferred reseller for many years. May knew Switchvox had the power and flexibility to provide a unified communications platform that would support SCPH's needs. May and his team usually sells and installs the Switchvox appliance, but Kendrick and his network support specialist, Eddie Mink, were confident they could do the work themselves. Outside of a small block of hours to help with the interface to AT&T in setting up the fiber optic and PRI network, the IT team from SCPH, along with a handful of interns, got the entire system operable in about six weeks.

"In September 2011, we purchased two SMB 355 appliances for up to 400 users. We placed one at the Graham Road location in Stow, and the other at the Morley Health Center location in Akron. All the various programs and their locations came onboard in implementing the new system."

One of the many benefits of Switchvox is that it requires very little, if any, advanced training. "It may sound funny, but there are habits that are hard to break like having to dial "nine" to get an outside line — those are the things people have the hardest time adjusting to. The Switchvox system is so user-friendly, I was able to customize an environment that was very similar to our old system so that if the user automatically dialed "nine" to get an outside line (out of habit), the call still went through rather than returning a busy tone or forcing them to hang up and try again," says Kendrick. "That was a much friendlier way of breaking old habits and helping employees quickly learn the advanced features of the Switchvox phone system."

"There is so much you can do with Switchvox and the UC platform in mobility that it is somewhat overwhelming. Some are using the Switchvox app for the iPhone... A few of us are experimenting with tablets," says Kendrick.

Kendrick reports favorable feedback from staff. In keeping with SCPH's commitment to having every call answered by a live person, the receptionist is thrilled with how the auto attendant disperses incoming calls into call groups and queues assigned to certain departments. She no longer has to memorize a long list of extensions. Other team members are also enjoying the capability for mobility that came with the system. "There is so much you can do with Switchvox and the UC platform in mobility that it is somewhat overwhelming. The IT department and I experiment with the functionality. Some are using the Switchvox app for the iPhone so they can get voice mail and email through their Smartphone. A few of us are experimenting with tablets," says Kendrick.

The advantages of the new phone system continued to become clear as SCPH began integrating Switchvox into their business. "You know, the system is just so easy to install and set up, everything went smoothly. We had Switchvox set up in the two main offices within the month and all the phones switched over in the main office in a couple of weeks," Kendrick says.

“Customer service has improved 10 times over and we have a much higher rate of connected callers than we did before.”

Now when a person calls looking for their birth certificate, SCPH can transfer the call to our Vital Records office across town, just as though it were down the hall, without their having to hang up and call another number. SCPH found the new fax feature to be convenient when needing to add more fax lines with no extra cost. They also have a newfound friend with the conference-calling feature — a capability they never had.

Kendrick sums up all the new benefits when he explains, “Customer service has improved greatly and we have a much higher rate of connected callers than we did before. We have reports we can run that help us with quality control, figuring out problems and showing us areas for improvement based on call behavior. We had no way of knowing when calls were dropped before, or how many times someone called or how long they were left on hold. We can track all of that now, thanks to Switchvox.”



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