

## SUMMIT COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH



CASE STUDY

ASTERISK

**More than 540,000 residents depend on services and programs provided by Ohio's Summit County Public Health (SCPH).** Following its merger with the city of Akron's Regional Air Quality Management District 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 telecommunication solution quickly became a vital need for the newly integrated SCPH.

### **As Ohio's Summit County Public Health expands their facilities and services, Switchvox exceeds expectations with a flexible Unified Communications solution.**

Prior to the merger, SCPH employed about 130 workers consisting of a single administrative facility and two health clinics. After the two-city acquisition, the number of employees more than doubled to 275, while their three locations quickly multiplied into eleven facilities.

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IT and telecommunications manager for SCPH, each of the three individual entities had been operating their own outdated telecommunications system.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end-of-life Nortel was grossly insufficient for their internal needs, while Akron and Barberton were both running outdated analog PBXs.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

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Communications is key to SCPH serving its clients and they were struggling to meet the challenges resulting from the merger — 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, including statewide access to certified birth certificates and certified death records in Summit County, Ohio; and numerous medical, prenatal, nutritional, and dental services, such as vaccinations to children and indigent families who cannot afford private healthcare throughout the county. 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 merger hadn't happened, we already knew we were facing a problem with the phone system," Hendrick admits. "When the merger happened, it brought the phone system issues to the forefront and the Board of Health asked me to investigate." Hendrick knew just where to go to formulate a plan.

While employed with a smaller county agency a couple of years prior, Hendricks 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 Hendrick knew Switchvox would increase productivity and profitability utilizing voice-over IP (VoIP), at a price that was so attractive, the Board would find the money to pay for it. "I knew firsthand what it could do for 100 users. I had no doubt that a more powerful version could easily handle 300 or more users."

#### **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 a quote from Cisco for \$300,000," Hendrick explains. "The Board was trying to figure out how we could install and implement the Cisco in phases. No one was enthusiastic about this option so it gave me the perfect opportunity to offer Digium's Switchvox alternative."

After meeting to determine the agency's specific requirements, N2Net provided a quote that surprised everyone. The entire Switchvox solution would run about \$100,000. This included installation and set-up at all eleven locations; costs for having AT&T build a copper and fiber optic network; and setting up a small secondary data center at the Akron facility. "When I presented my plan to the County Health Board, they didn't believe me at first. They thought it sounded too good to be true, so I came back with a cost comparison between Cisco and Switchvox," explained May. "I showed them the \$200,000 savings was just to get us up and running. When I showed them the additional \$40,000 in savings resulting from the elimination of re-occurring costs and connectivity, it became clear Switchvox would pay for itself in 4 years, where the Cisco would have taken 11!"

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Summit County and Akron were the two biggest facilities with Akron having the most employees. Both were operating analog PBX switchboards answered by receptionists who transferred calls to extensions using direct inward dialing (DID). The much smaller Barberton office didn't have a PBX but operated a Point of Presence (POP) local and long distance line exchange.

Because Akron and Summit County offered such a widespread range of services, it was confusing for callers. For example, callers seeking information about school vaccinations or the Pink Ribbon Project for breast and cervical cancer screenings had to hang up and call another number. The phone lines persistently backed up with callers left on hold, waiting endlessly for vital information. Hendricks 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.

### **The Switchvox Solution**

N2Net has been a Digium preferred reseller for many years. May and Hendricks knew Switchvox had the power and flexibility to provide a unified communications platform that would support the needs of SCPH and its affiliates. May and his team usually sells and installs the Switchvox appliance, but Hendricks and his network support specialist, Eddie Mink, were confident they could do the work themselves. Outside of a small block of hours to help in the interface with AT&T in setting up the fiber optic network, the IT team from SCPH, along with a handful of interns, got the entire system operable in about six weeks.

"In January 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. Needless to say, all the agencies and their locations came onboard in implementing the new system, especially after the merger came to fruition."

One of the many benefits of Switchvox is that it requires very little, if any, advanced training. "It may sound funny, but things like not having to dial nine to get an outside line; not having to dial to transfer calls; not having to remember extension numbers — those are the things people have the hardest time adjusting to," says Hendrick. The fact that employees could quickly learn these and other features of the Switchvox phone system was a welcome relief.

Hendrick says 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 Hendricks.

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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,” Hendrick says. “We were surprised at how many phones we had to buy because we weren’t yet used to the merger.”

Now when a person calls looking for their birth certificate so they can get a passport, SCPH can transfer the call to Vital Records 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 dealing with companies without fax machines. They also have a newfound friend with the conference-calling feature — a capability they never had.

Hendricks sums it up all the new benefits when he explains, “Customer service has improved 10 times over and we have a much higher rate of connected callers than we did before. We have reports we can print 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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