

Medical Clinic Improves Caller Experience

Southside Medical Center adopted unified communications to improve patient experience without increasing operational expense.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
SOUTHSIDE MEDICAL CENTER - Healthcare - Atlanta, Georgia 200 employees
CHALLENGE - Improve patient experience - Streamline appointment process - Reduce IT burden
SOLUTION - Implemented Cisco Unified Communications Manager and Cisco Unified Contact Center Express - Purchased Cisco Unified Workspace Licensing Business Edition - Subscribed to Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) service that combines voice and data on same IP trunk
RESULTS - Improved patient satisfaction - Saved up to five hours a week on appointment reminders - Avoided additional capital or operational expense

Challenge

The largest community health center in the Southeast United States, Southside Medical Center (SMC) provides affordable healthcare to the communities around Atlanta, Georgia, through a main facility and five satellite offices. The National Association of Community Health Centers has recognized SMC as having one of the best primary healthcare delivery systems for medically underserved people in the United States.

Like other healthcare organizations, SMC is challenged to provide an excellent patient experience without increasing costs. The patient experience typically begins when the patient calls to schedule an appointment, previously a time-consuming process for patients and staff alike. Each office had its own telephone system, and patients had to call each office separately for appointments or billing inquiries. "If the operator transferred a caller to a department that already had the maximum number of calls waiting, the call would be returned to the switchboard, frustrating patients," says D'Juana Dudley, executive assistant to the chief executive officer, SMC. And patients who dialed the wrong office had to hang up and call back because staff could not transfer them to another office.

When its phone and Internet access contracts came up for renewal, SMC took the opportunity to consider other communications systems. The choice came down to upgrading the existing private branch exchange (PBX) system or adopting unified communications. "We depend on government grants, so we needed a solution that would not require any capital outlay or increase our operational costs," says Ty Nguyen, interim vice president of IT. What's more, SMC needed the solution to be fully operational within 27 days, when its service provider contracts would expire.

Solution

After comparing multiple communications solutions, SMC selected Cisco® Unified Communications Manager, which combines voice, messaging, mobility, and video capabilities in a single system. "We had confidence in Cisco Unified Communications because it's a market leader," says Nguyen. "In addition, our IT staff is already familiar with Cisco routers and switches, which would simplify the transition."

Digitel Corporation, a Cisco Premier Certified Partner, installed Cisco Unified Communication Manager 7.0 and Cisco Unified Contact Center Express at SMC headquarters. Satellite offices receive services over the network, and employees in these offices enjoy exactly the same collaboration tools available to headquarters employees. If the communications line to any office is lost, calls to that office are automatically routed to the main location. And if the link between the satellite office and the main office becomes unavailable, the Cisco router automatically routes voice traffic to the public switched telephone network (PSTN), a capability called Cisco Unified Survivable Remote Site Telephony. Patients and staff experience no interruption in service.

Digitel integrated the new system with an outbound dialer for patient appointment reminders. "Digitel made sure that everything was in place on the day promised, and we converted our satellite offices to Cisco Unified Communications in just one evening," says Nguyen.

To make it easier and more cost effective to later add unified communications applications such as messaging and video, SMC purchased Cisco Unified Workspace Licensing. One simple package includes client and server software, licensing, and service and support, and Cisco Unified Communications Software Subscription. The subscription provides three years of access to major software upgrades, enabling SMC to keep its communications tools up to date without additional expense. Digitel provides SMARTnet technical support and also trained SMC's IT staff.

"We improved the caller experience and simplified collaboration between satellite offices without any upfront capital outlay and without increasing monthly operational expense."

—Ty Nguyen, Interim Director of IT, Southside Medical Clinic

Results

Return on Investment

In today's healthcare environment, providers need innovative ways to contain costs. Rather than paying for separate voice and data lines, SMC now receives a single Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) line from Paetec, a Cisco Certified Silver Partner. (This is possible because Cisco Unified Communications Manager supports SIP.) Monthly communications bills have decreased by 50 percent, more than covering the lease payment for Cisco Unified Communications from Cisco Capital Finance. "We improved the caller experience and simplified collaboration between satellite offices without any upfront capital outlay and without increasing monthly operational expense," says Nguyen.

SMC is saving more in ongoing operational costs by using the Cisco solution to automate 500 to 600 daily appointment-reminder calls. This service eliminated the ongoing monthly fee for an outsourced service provider.

Improved Patient Experience

Patients' initial contact with a healthcare provider affects their perception of the overall experience. With Cisco Unified Contact Center Express, patients can conveniently call one number to make an appointment in any SMC facility. Centralizing appointment scheduling gave SMC an opportunity to employ three trained appointment specialists rather than asking office staff to make appointments in addition to their other duties. Calls are routed to the first available specialist, who can transfer calls to any facility with four-digit dialing. Each agent specialist handles 300 to 500 calls daily. If a patient calls a clinic directly, staff can now transfer the call to the main appointment center. And if one facility is especially busy, calls are automatically routed to another facility so that callers can reach a live person sooner.

As SMC adds new offices, the built-in reporting in Cisco Unified Contact Center Express will help the health center know when to hire more agents. "The reports show call volume at different times of day and indicate trends," says Nguyen.

Simplified Management

Just three IT specialists support 200 employees, making it essential for SMC to have an easy-to-manage communications system. Cisco Unified Communications Manager provides tools to monitor and maintain equipment over the network, freeing up IT staff from having to drive up to two hours to satellite offices. What's more, IT personnel no longer need to spend four hours on every telephone extension move, add, or change. "We're saving 20 hours each month because we can just disconnect the phone and reconnect it in the new location," says Nguyen.

“If I need to find out whether my boss is available for a speaking engagement while he’s in a meeting, I can just send an instant message instead of interrupting the meeting.”

—D’Juana Dudley, Executive Assistant to Chief Executive Officer, Southside Medical Clinic

Improved Collaboration

Dudley uses Cisco Unified Personal Communicator on her PC to exchange instant messages with SMC’s chief executive officer. “If I need to find out whether he’s available for a speaking engagement while he’s in a meeting, I can just send an instant message instead of interrupting the meeting,” says Dudley. Similarly, Nguyen uses instant messaging to provide confidential information to the HR department because phone conversations can be overheard in the cubicle environment.

With Cisco Unity® Connection and the Visual Voicemail Widget, employees view, search, sort, and play voicemail messages on the display of their Cisco Unified IP Phones, Cisco Unified Personal Communicator, their email inbox, or a web browser, and just click to listen in any order.

Support for Mobile Employees

SMC executives and managers use Cisco Unified Mobility to redirect calls to their mobile phones or home phones. “I don’t have to give out my mobile number because my mobile phone rings if someone dials my office number,” says Justin Fowler, IT technician, SMC. The IT department and security officers carry Cisco Unified Wireless IP phones so that they can be reached anywhere in the building at the same phone number.

Next Steps

As SMC acquires other medical practices in North Georgia, adding them to the communications system will require no capital outlay other than IP phones and a Cisco Integrated Services Router. SMC also plans to implement Cisco Unified MeetingPlace® Express, so that executives and managers in different offices can collaborate with videoconferencing. “This will definitely increase productivity because driving 20 miles through Atlanta to another office can take two hours,” says Nguyen.

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Unified Communications, visit: www.cisco.com/go/unifiedcommunications

To join conversations and share best practices about collaboration, visit: www.cisco.com/go/joinconversation

PRODUCT LIST

Network Systems

- Cisco Catalyst® 3560 Switch
- Cisco Integrated Services Router 2821 and 2811

Collaboration, Voice, and Video

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager
- Cisco Unified IP Phones 7975, 7962, 7942, and 7937
- Cisco Unified Wireless Phone 7921
- Cisco Unity Connection Unified Messaging
- Cisco Unified Contact Center Express
- Cisco Unified Workspace Licensing Business Edition



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