

City Gains Efficiency and Improves Service Delivery

Frisco, Texas, chooses Unified Communications with broadcast, paging, and recording capabilities to improve delivery of city services.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CITY OF FRISCO

Texas, United States

CHALLENGE

- Provide consistent telephone system for all city departments
- Automate and simplify complex, manual processes
- Serve citizens more effectively

SOLUTION

Solutions for providing consistent telephone service, alerting city employees, and documenting interactions with citizens

RESULTS

- Accelerated callers' connection with correct city department
- Improved ability to manage code enforcement cases, animal control situations, and emergency situations
- Significantly improved efficiency and use of taxpayer dollars

Business Challenge

Rapid growth brings numerous challenges to a municipal government. Located north of Dallas, Texas, Frisco is one of the fastest-growing suburban areas in the United States. Since 2000, the city's population has tripled, which motivated significant municipal building activity and expansion, including a new Municipal Center, centralized police department, fire department headquarters, and several fire stations.

New facilities were not the only improvement needed to support the city's rapid growth. Its IT organization simultaneously began transforming its capabilities in order to improve citywide communication, government efficiency, and service delivery. For example, city departments had traditionally shared five separate telephone key systems. Transferring a

caller from one department to another required using a separate outside telephone line, which prevented other callers from quickly getting through. Often, the city employee would have to ask the caller to hang up and call a different number to reach the desired department.

"From a citizen's perspective, that is terrible customer service," says Curt Balogh, director of information technology and special assistant to the city manager. "When you do not have the technical capabilities to automate service delivery, you must add employees. With extremely rapid growth, that is not a sustainable strategy."

Other manual processes also reduced productivity. Prior to performing IT maintenance, someone would literally walk to every department and ask employees to shut down their computer systems so that important work could be saved. If the email system went down, there was no way to notify all employees.

Employees in city departments such as animal control, code enforcement, and planning document each case, often including transcripts of conversations with citizens. If a conversation became heated, the employee activated a handheld recorder to record the call. Frequently, however, the early portions of the interaction would not be captured. Tapes would have to be transcribed and attached to the correct case, which resulted in hours of additional work, increased the potential for errors, and made it more difficult to reach effective solutions.

The City of Frisco envisioned a “connected community” with integrated communication capabilities across its new facilities. It chose to work with Cisco; Cistera Networks, a Cisco Technology Developer Partner; and Flair Data Systems, Inc., a Cisco® Gold Certified Partner. Together, they helped create a foundation for solutions that link all agencies and constituents to improve safety and security, accelerate emergency response, and better serve constituents’ daily service requirements.

“We have changed the conversation within city departments to one of looking for new ways to innovate and improve services or efficiency. We have the platform to build upon without more significant investment. In the past, we did not have the capability to innovate. Today, we do. And we are.”

– Curt Balogh, Director of Information Technology and Special Assistant to the City Manager for Frisco

Solution

Flair Data Systems worked with Frisco to implement its network and Cisco Unified Communications solutions across the city. Now all employees, including police, firefighters, and emergency services operations teams, are connected on one telephone system with a single prefix using Cisco Unified IP Phones. With comprehensive IP communications in place, Frisco implemented a citywide, multi-jurisdictional Cistera Event Alerting and Notification solution using high-availability Cistera *Convergence* Servers with *RapidBroadcast*, *QuickRecord*, and *CallCenterRecord* application engines.

RapidBroadcast allows departments to send instant voice, text, Short Message Service, or pre-recorded messages to defined user groups so that administrators can coordinate large groups of people quickly. For example, the Frisco finance department uses weekly paging to notify users on several floors of the Municipal Center building about imminent server backup processes, so that users can save their work and log off the system.

The police department uses the Cistera Quality Assurance and Compliance solution in the booking area. If an emergency situation arises, an officer activates a panic notification by pressing a single button to alert a team of officers within the police department and receive assistance. The system can also record the situation for later review. Police detectives are also enthusiastic users of the recording capabilities, which help enable them to record details of calls with persons of interest in criminal cases and to attach audio files of those calls to specific case files. The ability to easily capture and retain conversations that previously were not recorded greatly simplifies the evidentiary process.

City employees in the code enforcement and animal control groups use *QuickRecord* to record conversations for evidentiary and archiving purposes. After the call, the recording can be attached to an email message or tagged with an account number and shared as needed.

“Employees can capture the entire call as long as they press the record button before ending the call,” says Gil Fernandez, technical support specialist for the city of Frisco. “Even when a call escalates, the entire conversation can be captured, and the call can automatically be tagged with an account number or case number. Recording saves time, improves the quality of evidence for citations and court appearances, and makes employees’ jobs much easier.”

Frisco Municipal Court uses *CallCenterRecord* to record incoming calls. The recordings can be tagged by case number and can be used to confirm details of the case during case resolution.

Results

Today, all city departments use a single prefix, simplifying citizens' ability to reach the correct person and employees' ability to transfer calls. Event alerting and notification capabilities help ensure that everyone is informed of events or situations that affect their work. In an emergency, these capabilities can deliver instant alerts to all city employees.

Quality assurance and compliance recording capabilities have helped improve employee productivity, and they also are playing an important role in improving situation outcomes and facilitating employee training. In code enforcement or animal control situations, when callers become angry or emotional, recordings enable the employee and supervisor or other objective person to listen to the call, review actions or recommendations, and identify steps that can help improve problem resolution. For example, a supervisor can suggest additional ways to handle a call or call the citizen back with a more objective perspective of what occurred.

"We now can be more effective with citizens and continually improve our responsiveness," says Fernandez. "At the same time, we can minimize the time and effort required to document and search for information associated with cases and accounts."

Improved services and higher efficiency ultimately translate to better use of taxpayer dollars. In addition, Frisco's investment in a sound network and application infrastructure offers the opportunity to realize a significant return on its investment, because new services and additional applications can be easily added over time.

Next Steps

In the next year, Frisco will begin implementing a metro radio system that will use the Cistera Event Alerting and Notification engine, *LMRConnect*. Emergency operations teams and designated responders throughout the city will be able to simply "push to talk" on their Cisco Unified IP Phones or communicate using radio, regardless of the radio frequencies being used. The solution will also record all radio communications, providing valuable data for training, as well as documentation of emergency responses. The city expects the new solution to significantly improve its ability to manage emergencies of any size, and radio service will be extended to public works, parks, and recreation employees as well.

"We have changed the conversation within city departments to one of looking for new ways to innovate and improve services," says Balogh. "We have the platform to build upon without more significant investment. In the past, we did not have the capability to innovate. Today, we do. And we are."

For more information

To find out more about Cisco solutions and services, visit: www.cisco.com.

To learn more about the City of Frisco, visit www.friscotexas.gov.

To learn more about Cistera, visit www.cistera.com.

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