Service Without Ownership

AT&T partners with the Lone Star State to blaze new trails in networking efficiency and customer service.

With the help of AT&T, Texas state government has laid the foundation for a truly remarkable telecommunications service delivery platform. Using advanced communications technologies and a well designed strategy for integration and collaboration among agencies, Texas and AT&T are building a public service communications model for the future.

The Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR), the agency responsible for the state's telecommunications, worked with AT&T to deploy an advanced Internet protocol (IP) network infrastructure that has applications for state, county and local government agencies across Texas. The new platform enables governments to offer a range of innovative and efficient new services and gives Texas residents access to multiple services with a single phone call. Creating a statewide infrastructure positions the state to use communications capabilities more efficiently.

The infrastructure employs AT&T's IP Services Gateway technology to provide a range of intelligent functions. The IP network's ability to handle voice, data and video information allows the network-based interactive voice response (IVR) to pull information from databases and other resources across the state to handle complex requests. The IP network also allows Texas to reallocate bandwidth and redirect caller traffic in order to manage spikes in usage.

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Application of the New Infrastructure

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) was the first state agency to take advantage of the new IP network for the 211 help line that provides social and community services information statewide. Using the infrastructure allows callers from all over Texas to quickly and effectively get information on services available in their communities. Behind the scenes, an advanced IVR routes the traffic through AT&T's intelligent network. By integrating this self-service functionality into the network, it ultimately moves the service closer to the callers so they can achieve self-service functionality without routing the call to an individual for response, saving bandwidth and staff time. For example, the IVR can speech-enable existing applications that reside on the state's Web portal, providing another access channel to the public for self-service transactions. The result is better customer service and improved service-delivery efficiency.

When the focus of 211 operations shifts to meet the demands of a potential disaster, the IP network can quickly reroute calls to provide optimal call distribution. This was experienced when the Federal Emergency Management Agency publicized the Texas 211 number after hurricanes Katrina and Rita. With Katrina, many New Orleans evacuees were in Houston and with Rita heading ashore, the 211 system became overloaded in the greater Houston area. With the system's new capabilities, the state was able to distribute many of those calls to other areas in the state. "During the hurricanes, we were able to do some things we would have never been able to do with the old technology — to adjust, to increase capacity, to intelligently distribute calls," said Brian Kelly, director of Telecommunications for the DIR.

Meeting Future Demands

The state's agreement with AT&T has opened the door to vast potential for deploying new applications. "In the aggregate," Kelly said, "you wouldn't need as much bandwidth if it all could be effectively shared, versus each entity deploying network resources to meet their individual needs." In addition, at the enterprise level, business rules can be applied to manage calls most efficiently so that a large pool of distributed resources can be applied as one. For instance, if a Spanish-speaking representative is needed in an area where one is unavailable, the calls can be automatically rerouted to a representative in another area.

The DIR is currently working on an application for the Comptroller of Public Accounts that will automatically notify businesses that are delinquent on tax payments. The current manual process will be improved by implementing an automated call system. The solution will be constructed so that the IVR will out-dial the specified phone number and utilize advanced speech technology to inform the taxpayer of the delinquency and how to contact the Comptroller's office to remedy the situation.

The state's relationship with AT&T lets the DIR implement even more innovative services in the future without worrying about enormous upfront infrastructure costs. "It's service without ownership. We don't own the infrastructure, we pay for it as we use it," said Kelly. "AT&T is responsible for scaling it as the enterprise grows. It's almost overwhelming when you start to think about the potential array of applications and how these services can be used to deliver value to the state."

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