Pinellas County Deploys Cost-Saving, Highly Resilient Unified Communications Platform with a Three-Year Return on Investment

Situated on the Gulf coast of Florida and encompassing the cities of St. Petersburg and Clearwater, Pinellas County is home to close to one million people. Like many local governments, Pinellas County had been facing pressure to maintain high levels of public services even as economic uncertainty has left the County with flat to declining financial resources. To help stretch its $1.7 billion budget, the County has been looking for ways to increase operational efficiency and workforce productivity and combat rising administrative costs.

Challenge

The Pinellas County government sought to generate efficiency savings and improve the scalability of its phone and communications networks. The County also wanted to strengthen its phone system's ability to withstand natural disasters, such as a major hurricane.

Solution

The County implemented an open Voice over-IP communications platform from Atos Unify, including Atos Unify OpenScape Voice and Atos Unify OpenScape Xpressions technologies running on Atos Unify's OpenScape UC Server. The project replaced more than 9,000 ports with VoIP phones, provided unified messaging, presence and conferencing capabilities, and has the capacity to scale to serve as many as 100,000 users.

Result

Pinellas County is now realizing benefits of more than $800K annually from its new VoIP communications system, including lower expenditures for trunk lines, system maintenance, technical personnel, and day-to-day management. Over five years, the County will realize an estimated $1.8M in benefits (net present value) on an initial investment of $2.2M.

Facing the Challenges of Modern Government

Kick-starting the efficiency drive, County commissioners authorized a one-time expenditure on selected projects that would lead to immediate or recurring cost savings. Among the most promising were several initiatives proposed by Pinellas County's Business Technology Services (BTS) department, which manages the County's information technology and communications operations. The department proposed several projects designed to generate savings and help the County maintain service levels in a tight budget environment.

One of these projects targeted the County's communications infrastructure — an aging copper-wire PBX phone network that was not only expensive to maintain but offered few modern features like mobiledevice integration and easy-to-use collaboration applications. In this "non-unified," hard-wired environment, voice and data streams had to be managed separately, while the process of adding and changing phone connections was laborintensive and costly.

Furthermore, officials wanted to build a robust and resilient platform that could keep emergency communications open in the event of a natural disaster such as a major hurricane, a perennial threat to Pinellas County. The County's existing hard-wired infrastructure lacked the flexibility needed to circumvent the network disruptions that invariably accompanies these events.

Atos Unify Openscape Solution

After evaluating a range of vendors, Pinellas County chose an open, softwarebased communications platform from Atos Unify to replace its legacy PBX system. Based on the latest generation of IP technology, Atos Unify reduces costs in several ways: it enables use of more efficient network transport such as SIP trunking and intelligent call routing, and provides greater scalability with the capacity to add up to 100,000 users. In addition, Atos Unify provides greater redundancy and resiliency capabilities that enables the system to keep running during natural disasters.

Implemented in twelve months, the new platform consolidated all County agencies on a single IP-based platform. In the process, the County migrated to economical SIP trunk lines and replaced more than 9,000 communications ports with easy-to-dminister IP-based phones and clients. The County's platform includes:

OpenScape Voice, a carrier-grade, native IP-based soft-switch

- OpenScape Xpressions, a technology that delivers voice messaging, unified messaging, instant messaging, presence, and audio and Web conferencing capabilities
- Atos Unify OpenScape Contact Center, with skills-based routing and blended multi-channel interaction handling
- Unified Communications Suite with Audio Conferencing, Web Collaboration, and Presence with Windows Outlook Integration

By moving to a software-based communications model, Pinellas County can now manage its communications networks in a modern data-center environment along with other businesscritical applications. The open platform allows easy interoperability with other technologies and can be more efficiently administered and maintained than conventional PBX phone systems. Upgrades are easier and faster, and applications can be deployed in a virtualized data center that utilizes the County's existing VMware investment.
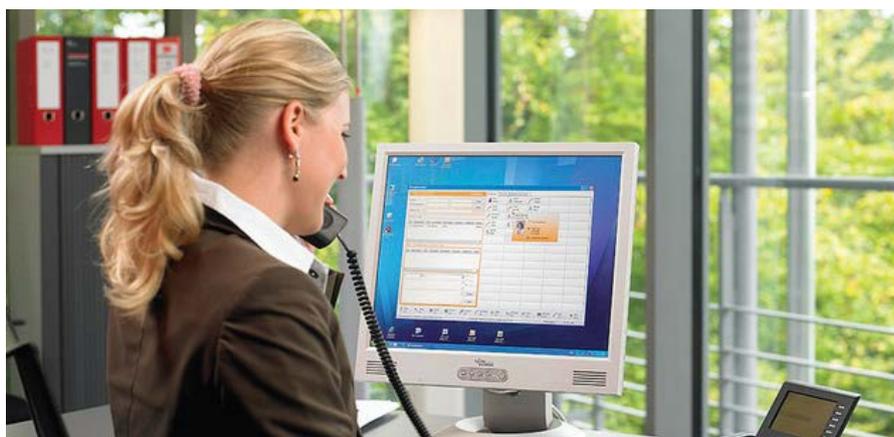
Business Results

According to the latest assessment by Mainstay, Pinellas County remains on track to achieve $1.8 million in savings over the next five years from its investment in Atos Unify, and will achieve payback in three years. Key benefits include:

Reduced Support Costs

With the move to the software-based IP communications platform, the County now has fewer physical installations to maintain — from 17 to just one — allowing it to cut technical support by half. As a result, the County expects to save an estimated $450K annually.

Lower Trunk Line Costs

Pinellas County estimates it has cut expenditures on trunk lines by approximately $300K per year as it shifted to a more economical IP communications platform. Previously, the County paid $700K per year for access to the PSTN copper-line trunks. Equivalent IP trunk-line bandwidth costs only $400K per year.

Why Atos Unify?

- Lower support and maintenance costs

- Advanced business continuity capabilities

- Timely system updates using fewer resources

- Dynamic staffing capabilities for easy system scaling

- True data center model with layer-3 redundancy

- Ability to leveraged legacy investments

- Fast implementation timeline with minimal disruption to end usersinteraction handling

- Unified Communications Suite with Audio Conferencing, Web Collaboration, and resence with Windows Outlook Integration

Cost-Effective Collaboration

The County is generating significant savings as it rolls out a range of collaboration capabilities, including audio conferencing, web collaboration, and presence — all integrated on Atos Unify's IP-based communications platform. Features like audio conference, enhanced Pinellas County's system and eliminated the need to utilize multiple systems.

Reduced IT Workload

The centralized IP network, which employees can administer more easily using software-based switches, has enabled the County to devote fewer personnel to phone-system management. The County estimates it can reduce the workload equivalent of three full-time positions, saving approximately $450K annually. Over five years, the County estimates it will gain $2.5M in productivity savings from the decrease in support staff gained by the move to the centralized, unified communications architecture.

Efficient Phone Number Administration

Atos Unify OpenScape technology has made the task of changing phone numbers — or moving numbers between locations — a simple, fast and lower cost process. This is a significant advance over the earlier PBX environment, where changing phone numbers could take days and cost $125 per change order. Overall, the switch to IP-based phones is saving the County an estimated $50K per year and about $250K over five years (net present value).

Designed to Survive Natural Disasters

The new Atos Unify platform has given the County a higher degree of redundancy and resiliency in the event of a natural disaster. The new phone network architecture features Atos Unify OpenScape Branch survivability capabilities and a split-node configuration with one node in the County's Primary Data Center and the other in a hardened facility in the Highway Safety building. The redundant design allows the phone system — and regular business operations — to continue to operate normally if one of the nodes goes down. By contrast, the County's old system relied on a single main switch, making it vulnerable to a general outage if the County were struck by a hurricane or similar disaster.

Increased Customer Satisfaction with Modern Contact Center

As a result of its Atos Unify investment, the County has been able to significantly upgrade its helpdesk operations, creating a multi-channel contact center that answers queries and solves problems faster and more efficiently than before. The County took just a weekend to smoothly transition more than 500 agents in, 42 call centers, to the new IP-based center, which offers flexible work schedules. Today, customers calling into the center receive more efficient service because of OpenScape Contact Center's skills-based routing engine that matches incoming contacts with agents who are best-qualified to address any given issue.

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Cost Benefit And Breakeven Analysis

Combining savings from trunk lines, staffing, maintenance, and administration, Pinellas County is projected to save an estimated $800K per year, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Total Annual Cost Savings
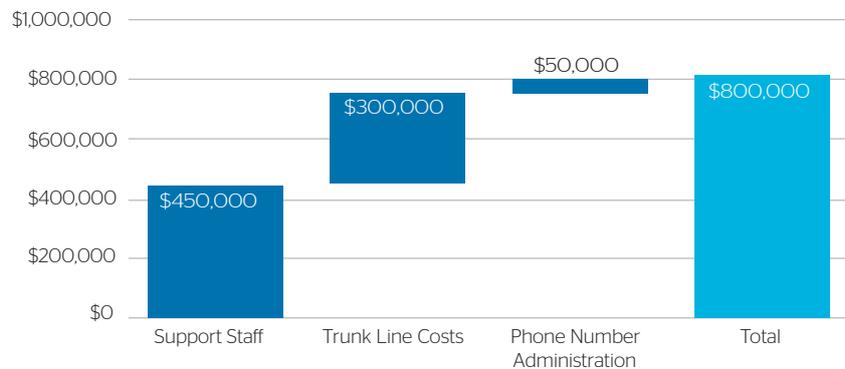
Dynamic Staffing

Pinellas County's move to OpenScape Contact Center was easy and cost-effective.The implementation took just twelve months, with agents migrating to the Atos Unify platform over a single weekend. The new software-defined center allows for easy scaling of resources across a virtual team of agents and ensures consistent service levels by dynamically redefining skills requirements as the real-time performance of the contact center changes.

"One of our requirements for a new solution was one that had increased survivability capabilities that could improve our chances of handling the weather we experience in Florida. With this new solution from Atos Unify, we have a much higher confidence that we can operate during a natural disaster."

Martin Rose, CIO,
Pinellas County

Factoring in its upfront investment of $2.2M on Atos Unify software, equipment and services, Pinellas County is projected to receive a net benefit of $1.8M over five years (net present value), as shown in Figure 2. According to our analysis, the County will break even on its event in the year three, as shown in Figure 3.

Summary

With budgets tightening and operating costs rising, Pinellas County was seeking innovative strategies to maintain the highest level of public services for less. A great cost-saving opportunity soon emerged: modernizing the County's aging PBX phone system with a softwarebased Unified Communications platform from Atos Unify.

Today all County agencies communicate and collaborate in a unified environment that integrates voice, data, conferencing, presence, and mobile capabilities on a robust IP-based platform that can be easily managed by fewer personnel in the County's data center. The proposed solution had a return on investment in three years — with capital expenses offset by cost savings — and the County ended up with a lot more: a modern communications, collaboration and customer service platform that is more flexible, powerful, and scalable than before.

The County also secured a critical new capability: the ability to survive and keep communications going during a major natural disaster. And it boosted customer satisfaction with a modernized contact center that connects citizens with agents that have exactly the right knowledge to help. All told, the County is on track to earn an estimated $800K in annual savings and will break even in the third year of the initiative.
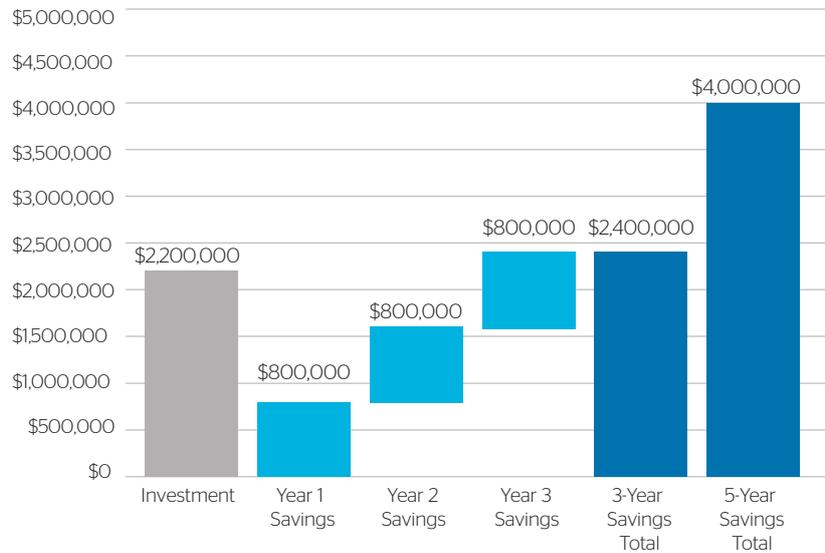
Figure 2: Total Savings in Year 3 and 5

Figure 3: Breakeven Analysis

"PTC Telecom provided us with excellent advice. The OpenScape solution from Atos Unify gives us the kind of flexibility that optimally supports the dynamic development of our company."

Jeff Rohrs,
Principal Enterprise Architect,
Pinellas County

About Mainstay

About Atos

Atos is a global leader in digital transformation with 110,000 employees in 73 countries and annual revenue of € 12 billion. European number one in Cloud, Cybersecurity and High-Performance Computing, the Group provides end-to-end Orchestrated Hybrid Cloud, Big Data, Business Applications and Digital Workplace solutions. The Group is the Worldwide Information Technology Partner for the Olympic & Paralympic Games and operates under the brands Atos, Atos|Syntel, and Unify. Atos is a SE (Societas Europaea), listed on the CAC40 Paris stock index.

The purpose of Atos is to help design the future of the information space. Its expertise and services support the development of knowledge, education and research in a multicultural approach and contribute to the development of scientific and technological excellence. Across the world, the Group enables its customers and employees, and members of societies at large to live, work and develop sustainably, in a safe and secure information space.

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Let's start a discussion together

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