



Nonprofit Moves to Next-Gen Unified Communications While Cutting Costs



Alliance Inc. swaps aging infrastructure for Avaya IP Office, Networking

Alliance, Inc. serves Maryland and the surrounding areas with services and opportunities that empower people with disabilities to achieve social and economic growth. The private, nonprofit agency assists clients, or stakeholders, with housing, employment and rehabilitative services.

The organization employs approximately 700 people; half are agency staff and the other half are stakeholders that the nonprofit employs in contracts. With seven locations and people working in the field, Alliance increasingly relies on its network to stay connected. As the organization expanded, it began outgrowing its outdated voice and data infrastructure, which taxed the small IT team.

“Outages were disruptive and we had to maintain separate PBXs at each location,” said Marc Fratus, Director of Technology at Alliance. “And with an electronic medical records (EMR) deployment on the horizon, bandwidth out to the system was critical. We had to get a more reliable and better-supported network.”

Surprisingly Affordable, and the Best Solution

As Fratus evaluated carriers, he found Comcast's Layer 2 Control Protocol (L2CP) attractive for the ability to simply turn a dial to increase bandwidth as needed and deploy IP sets to all locations but have them run off a central site.

“An on-premise solution was much more palatable and realistic – and less expensive than we thought. Plus, we liked the idea of having the equipment here and being able to control it.

We were pleasantly surprised that the best option for us also provided the most value over the long run. The Avaya system more than pays for itself by cutting our monthly phone costs. It is incredibly scalable and our costs will not increase as our needs grow.”

Challenges

- As the nonprofit expanded, it outgrew its outdated voice and data infrastructure, which taxed the small IT team.
- System outages drained productivity.
- The distributed work force needed mobility features.
- With an electronic medical records (EMR) deployment on the horizon, Alliance had to get more bandwidth, greater reliability and a better-supported network.

For the complete communications infrastructure, Comcast connected Alliance with Avaya Connect partner, Data Voice eXchange, Inc. (DVX). DVX outlined a plan to replace the outdated infrastructure and consolidate with Avaya solutions comprising Avaya IP Office and Avaya networking to give the organization the reliability and scalability it needs. With DVX, Alliance would also get much-needed IT support.

While Fratus fully expected to go with a hosted phone system, an on-premise solution was surprisingly affordable and the right choice for Alliance’s needs.

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“We can’t really go wrong with Avaya. They are the industry leader for reliability and the prices were right. When we looked at our options, Avaya would provide the most value over the next few years,” Fratus added.

Rock-Solid, Reliable Infrastructure

From planning to deployment, subject-matter expert DVX led the migration. Avaya IP Office resides in the Rosedale, Maryland location and IP phones serve all other sites.

Alliance employees can be at any of seven locations. IP Office boosts productivity by delivering calls wherever an employee is, equipping employees with the complete company address book on their mobile devices and allowing employees to plan and manage conference calls from anywhere. When calls come into their mobile phones, they can transfer to any extension within the organization.

Alliance can flexibly choose to centralize calls to one place or across the sites. Sites can take up to 46 calls at a time now, compared to 4-8 before. “We no longer lose calls because all our lines are taken up. We have plenty of lines for any need,” Fratus said.

The phone system additionally changes the conferencing experience. Before, Alliance relied on its former ISP to provide conferencing and the

Value Created

- The private fiber network helps provide the security required for HIPAA compliance and a backbone the organization can count on as it rolls out EMR.
- Alliance cut its monthly costs by about 10 percent.
- Projected across four years, the solution was the most cost effective and provided the best quality of service – not including the cost avoidance of eliminating copper.
- Alliance reduced backup time by about 60 percent.

login information kept changing. Employees used desk phones and the sound quality was often too poor to hear clearly. Moreover, the conference room hardware did not work well with the service.

Now, Alliance owns its conference bridge and employees simply share their unique access numbers with others. And Avaya plays well with virtually any conference hardware.

Most critically, the system keeps working, ensuring that Alliance can serve stakeholders without interruption. When the IT team needs to make changes or perform maintenance, they can flexibly offload one site to another and redirect calls, so service is never impacted.

Greatest Value over the Long Run

By consolidating all its communications with Avaya, and with support from DVX, Alliance serves 700 employees with an IT team of just two. Alliance minimizes legwork with DVX as a single point of contact managing six different vendors.

“Having phone and data with one provider means fewer calls to get something resolved,” Fratus said.

The combination of Avaya IP Office and networking gives Alliance the reliability and scalability it demands. The private fiber network helps provide the security required for HIPAA compliance and a backbone the organization can count on as it rolls out EMR.

“The Avaya infrastructure is far more reliable. Fiber gives us greater quality and capacity, so we can communicate reliably. The network is also significantly faster. We cut backup time by about 60 percent,” Fratus said.

By moving to the combined solution involving Avaya, DVX and Comcast, Alliance was able to consolidate its network lines and cut monthly expenses by approximately 10 percent. When Fratus projected costs for a four-year period – not including the cost avoidance of eliminating copper – the solution came in lower than the other options on the table, and also less than remaining with the status quo. Even better, the fiber solution gives Alliance higher quality of service than what it would have received with the other two providers.

“We were pleasantly surprised that the best option for us also provided the most value over the long run,” Fratus said. “The Avaya system more than pays for itself by cutting our monthly phone costs. It’s incredibly scalable and our costs will not increase as our needs grow.”

Next, Fratus anticipates expanding the organization’s use of the network for video conferencing and integrating email. As Alliance plans to move its headquarters soon, it has confidence that Avaya and DVX will simplify the move for them.

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Solutions

- Avaya IP Office™ Platform

About Alliance Inc.

Alliance, Inc., a Baltimore-based 501(c)3 non-profit agency, offers employment, housing, and behavioral health services to people with developmental disabilities, mental health issues, and substance abuse problems. Alliance’s mission is to foster hope and opportunities for people with disabilities and mental health needs to realize their dreams. With a focus on individual choices, needs, and strengths, Alliance’s comprehensive array of housing, behavioral health, and employment services help people live more independently and achieve their goals. At Alliance, every person matters.