



In time of crisis, Cincinnati Bell keeps community connected, protects employees



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For more than 145 years, the residents of Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana have relied on Cincinnati Bell, Inc. to keep them connected. Founded in 1873, the company has been around as long as the telephone itself. How does an organization not only survive, but thrive, across multiple centuries? Reinvention and near-constant evolution. It's in Cincinnati Bell's DNA.

When the World Health Organization declared Covid-19, the illness caused by the novel coronavirus, a pandemic, Cincinnati Bell's culture of innovation was crucial to its swift and effective response.

As Christina Neises, vice president of Contact Center Operations for Cincinnati Bell, Inc., explains, the company was battling this new enemy on two fronts.

"The safety of our contact center employees was paramount. We knew we needed to enable them to work remotely to allow for social distancing," she says. "At the same time, our call volume increased by more than 50 percent, compounding our staffing issue. We were in a situation of 'figure it out, and figure it out yesterday.' And that's exactly what we did."

Neises turned to longtime partner Avaya for a stable and reliable solution that could be implemented quickly and cost effectively. As a result, the company's staffing levels were normalized by week three.

“Not only will this provide a better customer experience, it will ultimately save money for the company.”

—Christina Neises, vice president of Contact Center Operations for Cincinnati Bell, Inc.

Challenges

- Manage 50-percent call volume increase created by global pandemic
- Safeguard health of contact center employees by enabling them to work remotely during Covid-19 crisis
- Gain insight into overall customer experience

Value Created

- Deployment of stable, reliable CCaaS platform that was implemented quickly, cost effectively
- 290 contact center employees safely working remotely
- Staffing levels normalized in three weeks
- End-to-end management of the customer experience creating better service, cost savings

Navigating a Crisis

Ohio's stay-at-home order caused a surge in subscribers seeking help to connect at home - whether for work, school or entertainment. A Cincinnati Bell survey conducted during that period revealed that a surprising 35 percent of new residential internet customers didn't have a service provider prior to the pandemic. On the business side, Cincinnati Bell saw increased demand for bandwidth upgrades.

“We have great relationships with Avaya and our partner STARTEK, and we said ‘this is the time where we need you,’” recounts Neises. “The teams from both companies came together with us and we were able to very quickly roll out a solution.”

Within two days of the issuance of Ohio's stay-at-home order, Neises and her team enabled more than 100 employees to work remotely. They continued moving forward at breakneck speed to transition the rest of the contact center workforce and restore their hours of operation to pre-pandemic levels. Within three weeks, 290 contact center employees were safely working remotely so Cincinnati Bell's call center was able to meet the increased demand for support and services from Cincinnati Bell customers.

“We hadn't implemented a work-at-home solution for our contact centers,” explains Neises. “From a business continuity perspective, we felt confident in geographic diversity. Unfortunately, that doesn't prepare you for a global pandemic.”

Neises' appreciation for her team during this trying time cannot be overstated.

“Our job is to be there for our customers - answer their calls, resolve their issues and try to do what's right by them,” she says. “The folks on my team worked 18-hour days. They willingly shifted from one function on Monday to something different on Tuesday based on the needs of the business. There are certainly many takeaways from this situation, however, one is clear: in times of difficulty, our employees care about one another and our customers.”

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—Christina Neises, vice president of Contact Center Operations for Cincinnati Bell, Inc.

About Avaya

Businesses are built on the experiences they provide and every day millions of those experiences are built by Avaya (NYSE:AVYA). For over one hundred years, we've enabled organizations around the globe to win—by creating intelligent communications experiences for customers and employees. Avaya builds open, converged and innovative solutions to enhance and simplify communications and collaboration—in the cloud, on premise, or a hybrid of both. To grow your business, we're committed to innovation, partnership, and a relentless focus on what's next. We're the technology company you trust to help you deliver Experiences that Matter. Visit us at www.avaya.com.

Moving to the cloud

In the months prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Neises and her team were in the process of upgrading their aging telephony infrastructure. Working closely with Avaya, they are rolling out a robust, multiexperience platform that will provide a 360-degree view of customer interactions and enable channels based on customers' preferred medium.

“We were very siloed, we had disparate systems and solutions for customer touch points across the organization,” recalls Neises. “This prohibited us from collecting and understanding, holistically, our customer interactions. That inconsistency across channels was resulting in frustrated customers.”

Neises evaluated competitive solutions, but ultimately, her past positive experience with Avaya made the decision easy.

“We looked at other vendors but made the decision to go the Avaya route because I knew I was getting a stable, reliable, robust and scalable platform,” she explains.

Cincinnati Bell is currently migrating from a premise-based solution to Avaya OneCloud. With its acquisition of Hawaii Telecom in 2018, the company recognized that moving to the cloud would position it to consolidate across geographies.

“With a single platform, we will be able to ensure consistent reporting, monitoring and management of our customer interactions, as well as our front-line support personnel,” says Neises.

Neises also anticipates cost savings once the implementation is complete.

“Once I'm able to truly understand why customers are calling and what they're calling about, it will allow me to drive incremental improvements in first contact resolution,” she says. “Not only will this provide a better customer experience, it will ultimately save money for the company.”

A solution that grows with you

Cincinnati Bell's long-term strategy is to continue to build and scale, which means more subscribers and more calls coming into the contact center.

“I knew the APC platform was something that I could leverage as we added more subscribers,” Neises says. “The additional agents I'll need will be fully supported on this platform. It will allow Cincinnati Bell to grow well into the future.”

About Cincinnati Bell, Inc.

Cincinnati Bell, Inc. has headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio. Cincinnati Bell delivers integrated communications solutions to residential and business customers over its fiber-optic and copper networks including high-speed internet, video, voice and data. The Company provides service in areas of Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and Hawaii. In addition, enterprise customers across the United States and Canada rely on CBTS and OnX, wholly-owned subsidiaries, for efficient, scalable office communications systems and end-to-end IT solutions.