Tooele County Customer Case Study

INTRODUCTION: A DECADE OF GROWTH

One could easily mistake Tooele County, Utah, home of the Great Salt Lake, barren Great Lake Desert, and the Bonneville Salt Flats for leading a quiet and sleepy existence. In reality, Tooele County faces many of the same challenges reserved for larger urban centers. Most of the county's 60,000 residents inhabit its eastern border with commutes to Salt Lake City a mere 30-minutes. As a result, the last decade has seen eastern Tooele County swell with new bedroom communities and legions of commuters.

According to a CNN Money.Com research report[1], Tooele County had the fastest job growth (123.35%) in the U.S. from 2000-2007. Though this dynamic growth has created a new vibrancy in this former mining mecca, it has challenged the region's infrastructure, especially the County's emergency services.

TOOELE COUNTY; KEEPING PACE WITH NEW CHALLENGES

"Tooele County is unique," says Lieutenant Regina Campbell, Communications Officer for Tooele County, "Not only are we challenged by the increases in crime, fires, traffic accidents, search and rescue, road closures that most U.S. communities have, but we're also home to a large government facility, the Tooele Chemical Agent Disposal facility at the U.S. Army Deseret Chemical Depot."

The Deseret Chemical Depot is one of five such government facilities that store and dispose of chemical weapons. A high degree of communication between the federal, state and local agencies including the Tooele County first responders is mandatory due to the volatility of the chemicals.

"The Deseret Depot adds an extra layer of readiness for our first responder teams, and the emergency dispatch team," continued Campbell. "Any incident at the facility is considered serious from a public safety and environmental perspective so we have to be fully prepared for all types of emergencies."

Tooele County Sheriff's Dispatch Center has to communicate with over 400 first responders plus representatives in over 40 different agencies. This is no small task considering the dispatch team is Campbell and fourteen dispatchers. Reaching and communicating with constituents on a timely basis is a constant battle and was made even more difficult in the past without the right technology and tools.

"Many people do not realize how many moving parts there are when responding to any incident in the County," said Campbell. "When a call comes in, it's quickly evaluated in terms of severity, location and the type of response required then we must quickly communicate with the right responders in the field. We service not only the fire, law enforcement, and EMS for the county, but also search and rescue, public works, state parks, and other federal, state and local agencies. Agencies within Tooele County pay dispatching fees to get quick dispatch to their first responders, every hour of the day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. With our small staff and limited budget, we decided to seek tools to make our communication process more effective, and to keep pace with the growth."

HIPLINK FOR SPILLMAN INTERFACE

As luck would have it, Tooele County uses the popular Spillman CAD (Computer-Aided Dispatch) system that offers an integrated wireless communications software through partnership with HipLink Software. In June of 2010, they tested and then quickly purchased the HipLink for Spillman Interface. HipLink messaging software was the missing piece they needed to quickly disseminate text messages to first responders and agency personnel that rely on smartphones and cell phones. Previously, when dispatch could not reach a responder through their radio device, they turned to manual communication options that consumed valuable time and often failed to reach their target receivers. Now, with HipLink in place, dispatchers automate the process of sending of outbound messages directly through the Spillman CAD. They previously struggled with a product called Emergin, that they were never able to implement the automation feature, resulting in text message delivery of up to 10 minutes.

"To say we rely heavily on HipLink is an understatement," says Lt. Campbell. "HipLink's Grouping feature is great. We segment individuals by their group membership and roles. If we need to send a message to say a specific fire fighter team, we simply create the message, select their group name, and then send the message. It's that easy, that fast, and very reliable. We also have the ability to send two-way messages when we require a person or group of people to acknowledge receipt of our message and/or respond with a return message. HipLink is so flexible that we can set up pre-configured responses that allows the receiver to simply key in a number for their selected response."

Since HipLink is an Internet-based application, a text message can be quickly created from any Internet-connected device. In Tooele County's case, nearly two dozen people are now authorized to send HipLink messages once they login to the system. As the individual's device type, phone number and carrier are already entered into the system, the sender does not have to look up those details. The HipLink User simply types the message, selects the group(s) to receive the message, and hits the Send button.

Lieutenant Campbell points to a number of ways HipLink has been put to good use. Due to funding difficulties, one smaller fire department could provide radio pagers to only 8 of their 15 members. Now, all members can be reached because they can receive text message dispatches on their personal devices.

In another recent case, the radio pagers in the County had to be re-programmed and for some reason, the programming failed on some devices and left some responders with malfunctioning pagers. Once again, HipLink came to the rescue as the dispatch team was able to reach those with bad pagers with a text message to be sure they knew they had to return to base to fix their radios. Lieutenant Campbell has found HipLink useful to reach individuals at various agencies, and even the Chief is now receiving messages when he's out of RF range.

"We like HipLink so much that no one would be able to take it away from us now. We've received such tremendous value and HipLink Software's technical support team has been just awesome. When we first started using HipLink, dispatchers were delivering out with SMTP to their Sprint devices. Sprint made changes to the protocol and suddenly all the messages were truncated. The HipLink team had an immediate solution to switch over to SNPP which offered us much faster, more reliable service. The HipLink technical support engineers were right on top of this situation. HipLink was so easy to set up and the training was excellent, everyone picked it up immediately."

"Using HipLink for text messaging has significantly reduced the number of callbacks the dispatchers receive with radio voice communication," said Campbell. "Text messaging can be used to clarify the what, when and where questions that are always asked. We've been able reduce the number of follow up communications. Additionally, because the first responders have the text, they can review it repeatedly as necessary."

1. "Best for Job Growth, " CNNMoney.com, by Beth Braverman, Althea Chang, and Lara Moscrip, 2008

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