

Collaboration relation:

New tools help staff build confidence and character in Girl Scouts

- **Business needs** - A communications system that could support staff in the office, at home, or in the wild.
- **Networking solution** - AT&T Office@Hand delivers the agility and power staff need to work virtually anywhere.
- **Business value** - Increased ability to stay in touch with volunteers and colleagues, convenience, and cost effectiveness.
- **Industry focus** - Nonprofit
- **Size** - 19,000 girls and adult volunteers

About Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas

Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas inspires girls to stand up and make a difference. By nurturing innovation and developing leadership skills, scouting prepares girls to overcome challenges and advocate for their ideas now and later. Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas has nearly 19,000 girls and adult members. They're proud to be part of a national organization that has more than a 100-year history of being welcoming and inclusive.

The situation

The organization was using an old, expensive Private Branch Exchange (PBX) system, a private telephone network. It was difficult to use and did not offer many options. Their system was originally purchased decades ago and built to support traditional landlines. What they needed now was a flexible, scalable phone system. One that offered more amenities and could support staff wherever the job took them, from the office to the great outdoors.

Solution

Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas chose AT&T Office@Hand. This cost-effective solution delivers the flexibility they sought. The Voice over IP (VoIP) system allows staff members to easily route work calls to their desk phone, desktop computer, laptop, or mobile device. It gives them the versatility to work where the adventure takes them. This proved to be an essential tool when COVID-19 forced many staff to work from home. The Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas also uses high-performing AT&T Dedicated Internet service. This enhances their productivity with bountiful bandwidth at the ultra-fast upload and download speeds.

Developing confidence and inspiring entrepreneurship

Since 1912, the Girl Scouts have inspired girls to embrace their individuality, strength, and intellect. While the organization has evolved over the years, Girl Scouts still mentors girls of courage who make the world a better place.

Steve Carnes became Vice President of IT and Digital Experience for the Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas two years ago. “When I first heard about the job,” he said, “I thought it would be cookies, campfires, and canoes.” He soon found that scouting today involves much more.

The organization continues to focus on developing confidence and character. It has also found innovative ways to make scouting more relevant for 21st century girls. “Now the girls don’t only earn their traditional badges—cooking, camping, and others,” Carnes said. “We’ve added cybersecurity, robotics, and mechanical

engineering badges. Our programs create a learning environment in which girls can be curious, ask questions, and not feel intimidated by their peers.”

Even as it has added to its curriculum, the scouts have maintained traditional activities. For instance, selling their famous cookies is still an important aspect operations. The annual cookie sale brings in 70% of the Girl Scouts’ budget. “The cookie program teaches girls sales and entrepreneurship and builds a sustainable troop model,” Carnes said. “They can raise enough money in the first year of their troop operations to sustain their troop for the next year and basically pay for all their activities.”

STEM pioneers

Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) have become an important part of the curriculum of Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas. In fact, the organization has become a pioneer in its STEM programming.

A decade ago, a large technology company approached the Texas organization about STEM programming after recognizing that it would soon face a staffing shortage. The company saw that there weren’t enough college students studying STEM, and offered to partner with Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas to add STEM to its curriculum.

The offer eventually led the Girl Scouts to build a \$15 million STEM Center in a wooded area in South Dallas. “Our organization offers advanced programs and workshops that revolve around STEM,” Carnes said. “Plus, it still does all the amazing things that Girl Scouts have done for the last 109 years.”

Advanced engineering and excitement

The STEM Center offers an impressive range of programs. “In our bioengineering workshop, the older girls actually design a prosthetic hand, and then use 3D printers to create the bioengineered prosthetic,” Carnes said.

Robotics has also become extremely popular. “We host robotics competitions in which the girls will build robots that battle,” Carnes said. “We’ve even been named the VEX Robotics Partner of the Year in 2019.”

Other programs include cyber exploration, coding, digital design, and even a hack-a-thon family event that explores the world of white hat hackers. “Every single weekend the classes and workshops are full,” Carnes said. “It’s a really fun environment for the girls, but they’re actually learning, too. It’s rewarding to watch them figure out the problems and see the light go on in their eyes. The parents love it. They think this organization really is relevant for their daughters today.”

Evolving their phone system for reliability, flexibility, and productivity

A staff of about 150, plus 20 AmeriCorps workers, operate the Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas. Like many nonprofits, the organization operates on a lean budget. While the technology in its STEM Center is top notch, staff at headquarters used an old, premises-based PBX to communicate with one another and the organization’s many volunteers.

Staff had no way to forward calls when they were out of the office, so many used their personal cellphones. “They were understandably reluctant to hand out their personal cell phone numbers to volunteers for fear of getting a frantic call at 11 p.m. on a Saturday night,” Carnes said.

In addition, they needed more advanced ways to connect. “Everybody texts,” Carnes said. “That’s just the way that you communicate. So we were looking for a solution that would also let us text.”

Finally, the organization wanted to move its phone system from the data center in its headquarters. “We lost power at our headquarters for three days and it basically shut down all operations because everything was on premises there,” Carnes said. A professional services consultant recommended migrating many operations, including phone service, to the cloud.

Efficiency and privacy

Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas evaluated several solutions. They decided to replace its aging analog phone system with AT&T Office@Hand. The VoIP solution delivers easy-to-use phone, fax, messaging, and conferencing capabilities. This enables staff to work as efficiently at home or at a campsite as they do in the office.

“The soft phone gave us the ability to maintain voice communication through a personal cell phone with the Office@Hand app,” Carnes said. “Basically, it’s another extension for an employee’s desk phone but obscures their personal numbers. That had huge appeal.”

“AT&T Business is a big supporter and its Office@Hand definitely checked all the boxes,” Carnes said. The solution supports operational continuity for the Girl Scouts. “Migrating to the cloud was a prudent recommendation, and the more equipment we can get out of the data center the better, so we can reduce the risk of another outage.”

Forwarding and conferencing made easy

Much of the organization’s work takes place in the great outdoors. That used to mean counselors were often out of touch. Now, however, they can answer calls made to their work lines while hiking and exploring with campers in the wilderness. Communication is no longer dependent on old-fashioned landlines.

The Office@Hand conferencing capabilities proved to be a blessing when COVID-19 led the Girl Scouts and many other offices to close. The organization had never implemented a conferencing platform, but Office@Hand delivered easy audio and video conferencing capabilities. “If AT&T Office@Hand had not been so versatile, we would have really had to scramble,” Carnes said.

The Girl Scouts implemented Office@Hand in February, just weeks before the pandemic began spreading in the U.S. It enabled staff to communicate and collaborate as if they were all working together at the office. “My team and I looked like geniuses,” Carnes said. “But it was really lucky timing that we started using Office@Hand right before the pandemic hit.”

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Moving into the 21st century

The service makes it easy for staff to work together. “The top priority was the ability to communicate with our members and staff without exposing their personal information,” Carnes said. “AT&T Office@Hand knocked that one out of the park. We’ve had really good adoption and heard good feedback from the volunteers that we’re moving into the 21st century.”

There’s sometimes a steep learning curve with new services, but AT&T Office@Hand was easy to use from the start. Staff especially like having the ability to text from their work phones. “It made everybody happy,” Carnes said. “It was a huge win-win to be able to use our work numbers to communicate outside of work time in the way that people prefer to communicate.”

Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas also added AT&T Dedicated Internet service to its office after seeing the way the service supported the advanced technology at its STEM Center. “We upgraded the circuit and had AT&T Dedicated Internet installed at



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our headquarters,” Carnes said. “That keeps us on the same network so we’re not doing a lot of handoffs. And we got considerably more bandwidth at the same price we had been paying another provider.”

More relevant than ever

Carnes appreciates having a dedicated account manager from AT&T Business. “The support has been phenomenal,” he said. “Our account rep set up a weekly time to touch base just to iron out any issues that we were having as we transitioned to working from home. AT&T Business is responsive to every request. They’ve gone above and beyond.”

AT&T Business is now helping the Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas add 5G capabilities to its STEM Center. “Another partner donated the fiber and 5G antennas and AT&T offered to donate the 5G services and operate the equipment,” Carnes said.

“Bringing 5G to the STEM center is awesome,” Carnes said. “It gives us a great opportunity to introduce another brand-new technology and become more relevant to girls than ever.”