



Helping the blind reclaim confidence and independence

- **Business needs** - Nonprofit agency wanted to give its employees the tools to perform their important work more efficiently and cost-effectively.
- **Networking solution** - AT&T Office@Hand and AT&T Professional Services boosted collaboration, streamlined operations, and cut costs.
- **Business value** - Providing blind, visually impaired, and sighted employees more tools to work productively and efficiently while saving the nonprofit money.
- **Industry focus** - Nonprofit
- **Size** - 175 employees

About Bosma Enterprises

For more than a century the Indiana-based nonprofit, Bosma, has been creating meaningful jobs for the blind and visually impaired. These are people who would otherwise face a 70% unemployment rate. The organization's business success (delivering vital products and services to government agencies and private companies) funds its Center for Visionary Solutions. Bosma teaches people who lose their sight the skills they need to live independently.

The situation

Many Bosma staff were unhappy with the new telephone system. The company's service provider had installed it to replace an older system. The new solution, however, was more expensive and lacked many of the features Bosma employees needed. The IT department began searching for an affordable alternative. The system would have to support the work of all staff, including those with blindness and visual impairments.

Solution

AT&T Office@Hand gives Bosma Enterprises employees a useful suite of capabilities including voice, fax, text messaging, and conferencing. AT&T Professional Services managed the Office@Hand deployment, simplifying the transition and helping the organization to benefit quickly from the powerful new services.

Providing a new vision

Creating opportunities for people who are blind and visually impaired is Bosma's mission. It is a unique organization that partners with businesses of all sizes. It provides products, supply chain management, and logistics. As part of their mission, they create jobs and training programs for people who are blind. More than half its employees are blind or have a visual impairment.

Bosma began as a government agency but has since become a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Years ago, its blind employees sold brooms on street corners. Today, they work as receptionists, IT and marketing professionals, accountants, and call center workers. "We have members of our executive team who are blind," said Bosma Chief Technology Officer Jason Bailey. "And we actually have someone who's visually impaired driving a forklift."

Visitors to Bosma's two buildings are greeted by blind receptionists. "The minute you walk into one of our facilities, you know that we're an organization that practices what it preaches," Bailey said. "We're practicing our mission of creating opportunities in every aspect of our operations for individuals who are blind or visually impaired."



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Jason Bailey
Chief Technology Officer, Bosma Enterprises

Bosma also works to help people find jobs in other companies. This program helps people who are blind support themselves. It also helps to diversify workplaces and connects employers with well-trained, qualified workers. In addition, Bosma provides in-home training for seniors, enabling them to remain independent as their eyesight declines.

Technology to support all employees

Fifteen years ago, Bosma won a contract from the federal government to package gloves and other surgical supplies for Veterans Administration hospitals. The contract enabled Bosma to hire dozens more workers. It also allowed Bailey to move from his position as an IT contractor to a full-time employee. He eventually became the company's chief technology officer.

Part of his job entails finding solutions to support the 52% of Bosma employees who are blind or visually impaired. “It’s really rewarding to find a piece of technology that will help employ someone,” he said.

New technology must provide value to all employees, so Bailey carefully tests all new equipment with a cross section of employees before introducing anything new. “If it doesn’t work for the testing group, there’s no way we can roll out new technology to the whole organization,” he said.

When Bosma’s phone service provider announced that it was phasing out the aging system the company used, Bailey began testing the vendor’s replacement telephony. “We tested the new system for a year and a half,” he said. “It didn’t work.”

Bailey arranged for a six-month contract extension with the service provider so Bosma could find a better solution. “I basically told my guys, ‘Stop everything that you’re doing. The hunt is on. We have six months to find a solution that gives us what we need.’”

A vital connection

Bosma’s phone system is vital for communicating internally and with customers. “We have employees working in multiple buildings, remote workers stationed across the U.S., and a customer service team that handles incoming calls for customers that don’t order electronically,” Bailey said. “It’s pretty simple. If we don’t have a phone system that delivers, we’re not going to get our orders, and down goes our revenue.”

Bailey needed to test potential new systems to ensure the one they chose would work with Bosma’s screen readers. These software programs allow users who

are blind or visually impaired to hear the text that’s displayed on the computer screen. “We evaluated eight different applications for phone systems,” Bailey said. “Most didn’t work with a screen reader. And we actually had other companies that refused to give us a demo product to try.”

Another key requirement for Bosma was business continuity. “We wanted a system that would support remote employees better than their cellphones,” Bailey said. “If employees are using personal phones to call customers, we lose all the customer information if the employees leave.”

Bailey was also adamant that the new system be cloud-based. “We have literally spent the last four and a half years trying to fully transition to the cloud,” he said. That factor alone disqualified many solutions. “A lot of companies still want you to do on-premises installations.”

Cost was another factor. The replacement system Bosma’s former provider installed was expensive. “I was hoping to get our costs down,” Bailey said.

A solution that checks every box

Bosma tried AT&T Office@Hand and quickly realized that it was a perfect fit. The flexible solution delivers a suite of voice fax, text messaging, and conferencing applications designed to help staff work more efficiently.

Bailey acknowledges some initial skepticism. “I thought, ‘It’s a new system. There’s no way this is going to work.’ But lo and behold, it was just what the AT&T Business team described. It checked off every box that we needed to check.”

AT&T Office@Hand integrates seamlessly with Bosma's screen reader systems and easily routes calls to the appropriate destination. The cloud-based solution eliminated the need for the video call systems and conference bridges that Bosma purchased when most of its employees began working from home during the pandemic. "Our last phone system didn't have that," Bailey said. "AT&T Office@Hand has video and conferencing services bundled into it. So, we were able to cut administrative costs."

Tools to do the job

The system lets staff know the identity of each caller before they pick up the phone. "I can quickly see missed calls, faxes, and voice mails," Bailey said. "It has our contact lists, so I can call one of my guys with just a click. The screen reader will communicate all the information for somebody who's blind, so they're able to do the exact same things in basically the same steps I do with a mouse."

Bailey and his colleagues appreciate having the tools they need to do their jobs no matter where they're working. "The biggest benefit for us is that you're never really away from your desk," he said. AT&T Office@Hand can route his calls to any or all of his devices. "We like the flexibility of picking up calls on whichever device is most convenient."

AT&T Office@Hand also gives all employees their own conference bridge. "They don't have to use a shared connection," Bailey said. "AT&T Business is giving us more tools than we've ever had—and still saving the company money."



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Convenient installation, easy transition

Bosma Enterprises used AT&T Professional Services to deploy AT&T Office@Hand. This simplified installation and freed Bailey's team for other tasks. "We were in the middle of eight projects at the same time that we were trying to go live with this phone system," Bailey said. "Using AT&T Professional Services was a major convenience for us. And we wouldn't have changed anything, because the AT&T team was fantastic."

AT&T Business kept Bosma informed with weekly calls. "Everyone on those calls was very knowledgeable about the system," Bailey said. "It was an easy transition. My department had a great knowledge of the system because we were the test dummies. My guys wanted to be the ones to train our end users because they felt like they had a great conceptual understanding of what the system was capable of doing."



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Increased operational efficiency

Bailey was impressed by the AT&T Business team that worked with Bosma. “Everyone was very professional, and even though AT&T Office@Hand was fairly new, they knew the product inside and out,” he said.

Using AT&T Office@Hand regularly has increased staff’s operational efficiency. “We haven’t had any issues. “We could not have been more thrilled with the sales process and implementation team,” Bailey said. “It was literally the most thorough implementation that we’ve done in a long time. It made my job much easier.”