

United Road Towing
redefines the towing
experience with

efficient, agile AT&T Software-Defined Networking

- **Business needs** - National towing leader needed a network with high availability to provide adjustable bandwidth at each of its locations so employees could better respond to and help stranded motorists.
- **Networking solution** - AT&T Software-Defined Network (SD-WAN) gives United Road Towing (URT) the flexibility to select network technologies on a site-by-site basis and the redundancy to support responsive customer service.
- **Business value** - Improved network performance, efficiency, security, and savings
- **Industry focus** - Towing and vehicle management solutions
- **Size** - 500,000 tows annually

About United Road Towing

United Road Towing, Inc. (URT) is the leader in towing, recovery, impound, and vehicle management solutions in both the private and public sectors. Through an extensive portfolio of local and regional brands, the company of 650 employees dispatches approximately 500,000 tows, manages over 300,000 impounds, and sells over 60,000 vehicles annually across the United States. It maintains 23 locations across 7 states.

The situation

As the company grew, it needed more bandwidth than its MPLS network was able to provide. URT officials began looking for a highly reliable solution that offered the right amount of bandwidth for each location, along with the redundancy to enable its employees to be always available to help stranded motorists, first responders, municipalities, and others that needed assistance.

Solution

URT chose AT&T SD-WAN to replace its legacy infrastructure. The SD-WAN solution includes a hybrid architecture that gives URT the flexibility to select network technologies on a site-by-site basis. The cutting-edge technology enables the company to easily add bandwidth to individual sites, improving the network's performance, efficiency, and security.

Help for individuals and communities in distress

United Road Towing is redefining the towing experience thanks to highly-trained and compassionate professionals, innovative equipment, and logistical technology. The company's goal is to make inconvenient situations better.

Jeff Gilow, URT IT Analyst/Telecommunications, said the company also manages storage and impound facilities for government agencies, road assistance patrols, coordinated dispatch facilities, and disaster recovery operations. "Our disaster recovery team works in areas that have experienced flooding by bringing in people from all of our locations to work with states or municipalities," he said. "We remove the vehicles that are damaged and get them to a spot where they can be inventoried, and insurance claims can be expedited quickly."

During the great Chicago blizzard of 2011, for example, a bus jackknifed on Lake Shore Drive during rush hour, blocking all traffic just as the snowstorm intensified. Stuck for hours as snow pounded the city, many just abandoned their vehicles on one of the city's busiest roads.



"We helped the city recover by getting every one of those cars off Lake Shore Drive so streets and sanitation workers could get the roads plowed and get it back open again," Gilow said. "We created temporary redemption centers for people to come get their cars."

The task required bringing in special equipment. "We literally had to take a giant forklift that's big enough to lift a car, lift each car individually, back it out, inventory it, and move it to the redemption center," he said. "And we did not charge a person or the City of Chicago a single dime for doing that."



Making bad days better

United Road Towing's greatest asset is its team, Gilow said. "We're committed to providing the best service we can, so our goal is to prepare our people well."

Gilow thinks excellent job training and enabling employees to further their education is vital in changing the towing industry and its reputation.

Officials realize that people who need a tow are usually in a difficult situation. "Imagine you're taking a cross-country trip, and something goes wrong with your car," Gilow said. "You're sitting on the side of the highway, thinking, 'Well, what do we do now?'"

URT employees do the best they can to assist customers. "We reinforce that all our people need to treat every person as an individual and provide that level of compassion and respect that everybody deserves," Gilow said.

URT tow truck operators can often diagnose the problem and fix it on the spot or coordinate any necessary services. "That helps us make the whole thing less stressful for people," Gilow added. "That's an aspect of our business that we really cherish."



Best-available technology supports staff

Beyond investing in its team, URT believes that investing in equipment pays significant dividends. Using the latest towing equipment can increase the safety of its team and the people who call URT for help. This philosophy extends to the technology the company uses, including customized dispatch software and trucks equipped with GPS-enabled data terminals.

The company also works to support its staff by providing the best available computer and communications technology. Gilow, who worked his way through college by running computer mainframes, is hands-on when it comes to URT's technology. He's responsible for the internet connections, servers, cell phones, office phones, and other equipment at the company's 23 sites. "I work with people at all our sites to be sure that everything is working," he said.

Amid managing everything, Gilow is always looking to the future. "I like working on the growth aspect," he said. "Where we're going, how we're going to shape IT, and what challenges we see going down the road. We're a small company, so I get to do a little bit of everything. And I really like that. It's very satisfying."

Transforming business to benefit customers

The process of transforming URT's business starts by putting themselves in the place of their customers. "Imagine that your car was towed," Gilow said. "You want to be able to find your vehicle and get it back as quickly as possible. And so we have to provide fast, efficient, professional services. That adds a layer of transparency to what we do. And we feel technology helps provide that layer of transparency."

The technology includes websites and voice-response units that make it easy for people to locate their vehicles. It also enables municipal governments and first responders to operate more efficiently. "We grant police departments access to our systems," he said. "When we inventory a vehicle that's coming into an impound lot, the information immediately goes into that computer system, and the police have access to that."



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Already an AT&T customer, the company reached out to AT&T for advice in upgrading its infrastructure. "We get a lot of help and tremendous support from AT&T," Gilow said. "If there's a problem or if we're looking to implement a solution, AT&T is one of the vendors we contact first to see if we're headed in the right direction."

Flexible, redundant, affordable

A deep understanding of URT's operations led AT&T to recommend moving to SD-WAN. "Our motivation was to try to right-size the bandwidth at our locations more easily and at a price point that worked for each of those sites," Gilow said. "SD-WAN provided that for us. It was just a natural decision that AT&T and United Road reached together, to move in this direction, and it's been a great thing."

The company also increased redundancy by adding a cable connection at larger sites. "That way," Gilow said, "if someone digs up a fiber cable, we still have connectivity overhead. We've worked with AT&T to make our large, critical sites robust, so we have as much uptime as possible. That's very important to us."

The switch to SD-WAN supports URT's cloud strategy in a way that's flexible and affordable. "Everything is headed into the cloud, and the solution that AT&T provided to us is one of the ultimate solutions for cloud integration," Gilow said. "It's also flexible enough that it allows us to keep our legacy applications. Our data center apps and others work just as well, so it gives us the ability to pick and choose what is going to be the most efficient and best way to deliver those products and services. All in all, it's a much better environment for us."



Technology changes can be difficult for an organization. The company's experience with AT&T, however, gave URT the confidence to move forward. "We've had a good relationship with AT&T for a long time," Gilow said. "AT&T was able to bring some credibility to this new technology and reassure us that this would work."

The company plans to migrate its last four MPLS locations to the SD-WAN network when the time is right. "It's great, because AT&T is able to provide interoperability during our whole transition period," Gilow said. "What other company could provide a transition while we move from one technology to another? That was huge because we simply couldn't have interruptions in our service."

Relationships matter

URT also uses SIP trunking with AT&T IP Flexible Reach, a cost-effective managed Voice over IP (VoIP) communication service.

"It's a wonderful solution that lets us control how our numbers are routed, and we can see usage," Gilow said. "It's a great technology." Employees also use about 200 AT&T cell phones.

In addition, the company is in the process of deploying a cloud-based security solution from AT&T. "It works exceptionally well and provides a level of security for our internet traffic that's unparalleled, so we're looking at an imminent implementation," Gilow said.

He chose a cloud-based security solution because it will enable him to customize the security to fit URT's operation and the many devices its employees use. "That's really important these days, with how fast a business can get into trouble," he said. "And it may actually end up saving us some money."

URT is also considering a move to FirstNet, the national communications network built by AT&T to provide reliable communications for first responders. "We work closely with a lot of police and sheriffs' departments so, we're looking at bringing many of our phones onto FirstNet," he said. "In case of a disaster, it will provide us access and enable the police to reach us so we can give them a hand."

Gilow appreciates the level of trust that he and his AT&T account team have established. "Relationships are everything," he said. "We could possibly pay less for some things from other vendors, but if it breaks and there's no one to fix it, that's an impact on our business."

First responders, business clients, and the public rely on URT for help. "They deserve the best possible service, so we have to have a company that's highly reliable," Gilow explained. "It really matters who we do business with. That's why our relationship with AT&T is so important."

"We have the assurance that AT&T is backing up everything that they had promised," he said. "And it's worked out tremendously."

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