



CASE STUDY:

CITY OF ATLANTIC BEACH

At a Glance:



Situation:

- Critical need for communications system with 24/7 uptime during weather events
- Ability for city employees to make and receive calls regardless of location

Solution:

- MiVoice Connect (housed in a co-location site in a data center 15 miles inland)
- MiVoice Connect mobile app

Results:

- Flawless, uninterrupted communications during Hurricanes Irma and Matthew
- City employees direct calls to their mobile or home phones during an emergency
- New features and capabilities, including automated attendant and conference calling
- 20% cost savings

Summary

Located on a small island, with city hall situated only four blocks from the ocean, the City of Atlantic Beach found that maintaining a functioning communications system during extreme weather was often a challenge. Now, even when the city is evacuated, they can ensure critical city communications continue to operate.



City of Atlantic Beach

The coastal City of Atlantic Beach, Florida welcomes both residents and visitors throughout the year. Keeping communication lines open, regardless of the weather, is a top priority for the city's employees, including police officers, public works employees and building inspectors.

Hurricanes Are No Match for the City of Atlantic Beach

Imagine you're a city government in Florida and a hurricane just went through your area, knocking out power, cable TV and other services that your citizens rely on. And imagine that your phone system isn't working, making it impossible for your staff to answer calls from anxious citizens who want to know when services will be restored or when they can return to the island. The coastal City of Atlantic Beach, Florida doesn't have to imagine, as it's been through this scenario many times. To ensure that this never happens again, the city deployed a Mitel MiVoice Connect communications system to improve resiliency and business continuity.

Lost Power, Lost Phone Services

Located on a small island, with city hall situated only four blocks from the ocean, the City of Atlantic Beach found that maintaining a functioning communications system was often a challenge. As Keith Randich, IT Director for the City of Atlantic Beach, explained, "Being on an island, we often lose power during serious weather events." It was not uncommon for tropical storms and hurricanes to shut down communications and paralyze response capabilities for the city's 125 employees, including police officers, public works employees and building inspectors, who were unable to communicate with residents and businesses during and immediately after major storms and hurricanes.

In the case of hurricanes and severe storms, residents and businesses are required to evacuate the area, and the bridges to the island are closed until the public works staff can clean up the downed trees and power lines. In these situations, it may take several days before residents and workers are allowed back on the island.

"Being able to keep up with our citizens when these events happen is crucial. With the MiVoice system, we now have two-way communications and can take calls from citizens about downed power lines or trees, for example."

Keith Randich, IT Director for the City of Atlantic Beach

As Randich explained, "During the storm, it's pretty quiet and we don't get many calls. The minute the storm passes, the calls start pouring in and we take around 175–200 calls a day from people wanting to know when services will be back up and they can return to their homes and businesses."

Randich added, "We need to be able to communicate with staff and citizens and require a phone system that can remain up throughout a storm." The city's old analog phone system wasn't up to the task and the city began shopping for a new phone system for its multiple locations. As a Cisco shop, they were ready to purchase a Cisco phone system, until Verteks Consulting gave them a demonstration of Mitel's MiVoice Connect. The city's managers decided to go with MiVoice Connect, an on-site unified communications and VoIP-based business phone system.



Working with Verteks, Randich and his team came up with a design that provides the business continuity and resiliency needed. Because of the distributed nature of the MiVoice Connect product, they were able to house the primary Connect Director Server in a co-location site in a data center 15 miles inland from Atlantic Beach. The data center features hardened computer rooms that hold the city's phone equipment rack and email infrastructure, as well as generators and batteries to ensure it stays operational during a storm. As Randich noted, "MiVoice Connect lends itself to very stable and resilient situations."

Weathering the Storm

The new design was tested and proven to work flawlessly when Hurricanes Irma and Matthew forced city evacuations. Critical communications continued uninterrupted during the hurricanes, even when the city was evacuated. During these storms, the MiVoice Connect phone system in the colocation site continued to take calls and messages even when power and utilities were out in Atlantic Beach. Calls were forwarded to employees' smartphones, enabling access to communications from homes, evacuation shelters and other locations.

For example, the Police and Public Works departments were relocated inland to where there was electricity and Internet access, and workers were able to take calls through the MiVoice Connect mobile app on their smart phones. After the storms passed and power was restored, calls were switched back to the employees' desk phones. In addition, Police Dispatch was relocated to the City of Jacksonville for almost a week and dispatchers were able to take emergency calls and respond as needed. Even though the city was evacuated, critical city functions continued to operate.

Now when there's a pending storm, city employees direct their work phones to their mobile or home phones so they can take and make calls from a safe location. Not only is communication streamlined, but worker satisfaction is improved as well. For example, in the past, all employees had to go to a nearby shelter in case they were needed during or after the storm, causing hardship for many of the employees who weren't able to be with their families. Now, with MiVoice Connect, staff members (with the exception of first responders) can work from home while receiving calls on their mobile devices and can ride out the storm with their families until they're needed back in the office.

Randich states, "This has been a tremendous plus for the employees. People used to take it very hard when they weren't allowed to go home and be with their families for these situations."

Residents and businesses now have two-way communications with city employees during critical storms and power outages. As Randich notes, "Being able to keep up with our citizens when these events happen is crucial. In the past, we were only able to provide one-way communications to our citizens through the home page on our website. With the MiVoice system, we now have two-way communications and can take calls from citizens about downed power lines or trees, for example."



Beyond Business Continuity – Cost Savings and More

In addition to the business continuity aspect, the City of Atlantic Beach benefited from the new phone system in many other ways. Cost savings were significant, as the VoIP UC system saved the city 20% on its phone bills (based on the use of PRI and network connections to the colocation site). Reduced support costs also provided savings.

“We have a 24/7 support contract with Verteks so they monitor our system and take calls if problems occur. They know when our equipment is down at the same time we do,” Randich noted.

The new phone system also provided capabilities not available with the old analog system, such as automated attendant, conference calling and more.

When asked about lessons learned from this experience, Randich admitted, “Now that we have this phone system and know what it can do, we wish we could have implemented it sooner so we could have been reaping the benefits for a lot longer.”

Based on its positive results and experiences, Atlantic Beach city officials are hopeful that the resiliency of this solution can be a cookie cutter solution across all coastal municipalities or businesses requiring continued communications, even throughout a hurricane. When the next tropical storm or hurricane hits – and we know it will – the City of Atlantic Beach will be ready.



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