

FROM STARTUP TO SUCCESS

MISSISSIPPI'S BROADBAND VOICE EXCELS IN THE VOICE-OVER IP INDUSTRY

Melissa Barron

Gary Watts has always had an entrepreneurial spirit. After serving as vice president of sales for several years at Jackson-based telecommunications company Unity Communications, he decided it was time to go out on his own. His knowledge of technology and telephony convinced him to begin the first Mississippi-based hosted Voice-over IP (VoIP) company, Broadband Voice, in 2006. Today, the company has more than 1,100 customers in 40 states.

VoIP is a methodology and group of technologies for the delivery of voice communications and multimedia sessions over Internet Protocol (IP) networks. This type of voice service has many advantages over the traditional type of telephone systems using the copper lines. VoIP is well suited for the trend of businesses spreading out geographically, having remote employees and looking for functionality that integrates seamlessly with mobile devices. VoIP also avoids charges for long-distance calls, and since there is less equipment to manage, maintenance fees are much lower.

"When we look at potential customers' phone bills with traditional telephony, we find that they are paying maintenance and long-distance fees that are drastically impacting their monthly expenses," explained Laura Johns, vice president of marketing and corporate development at Broadband Voice. "We have minimal equipment, no long distance and a system that operates in the cloud, not the IT closet."

The City of Brandon recently did a complete technology infrastructure upgrade using Broadband Voice as its voice and



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internet provider and is pleased with what VoIP offers. City leaders are happy because it allows employees to communicate more effectively between departments. In addition, the new technology practically eliminates the need for citizens to disconnect and dial separate numbers to reach individual city agencies. The city expects to save nearly \$70,000 a year with this new technology.

Initially focused on small and medium-sized customers, Broadband Voice recently shifted its focus to larger customers because the product is so scalable. One of its largest customers has 110 locations with multiple phones at each location. However, no matter the size of the customer, Broadband Voice is committed to delivering the same high-quality, personal service.

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It is rare to find a single VoIP provider that can offer a system-wide voice and internet solution for customers that also includes one-on-one personal customer service. But Broadband Voice can take the pieces and parts from other providers and use its wholesale relationships to deliver the best pricing to its customers. On the support side, the company aims to be the intermediary for

customers so that they can be able to manage their other day-to-day IT needs for their business.

Broadband Voice wants every customer, regardless of size, to feel valued. With the trend toward outsourcing customer service overseas, Broadband Voice understands that having a different business model provides a competitive edge as well. The company is committed to every customer service call reaching a live person willing to help – 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In fact, Broadband Voice offers a call installation list directly to the CEO so that when customers have a need or support issue, they know who to call, and the list is designed so the third or fourth call is actually to Watts himself.

Also, instead of simply shipping a customer its new phones, Broadband Voice sends a trainer to install the system and train each employee, regardless of where the customer is located. The company also has ongoing training for industries that traditionally experience a high turnover in employees, visiting them quarterly to make sure all current employees get the maximum use out of their phones.

“One of the biggest concerns we’ve found from customers with 20-plus years of history with traditional telephony is the perceived headache of the migration itself,” said Watts. “Not only are we willing to migrate customers from any traditional phone system, but we are passionate about being there for the customer every step of the way.”

Customers appreciate this extra effort. One satisfied customer is the law firm of Copeland, Cook, Taylor & Bush P.A. in Ridgeland. Unsatisfied with its VoIP provider at the time, the law firm hired Broadband Voice and switched over its 200-plus phones.

“Based on our experience with our previous vendor, we were prepared for a disastrous installation,” remembered Joe Scherer, IT manager for the law firm. “The Broadband Voice solution was installed at three locations within a few days and was smoother than any of us could have imagined.”

Another customer service aspect that elevates Broadband Voice’s reputation is that its employees make the service calls to the customer’s internet provider as well. Because VoIP depends on internet, which the company does not provide, Broadband Voice works with the customer to find the best solution, doing

an audit of every provider and every price. Instead of the customer making a dozen phone calls for each state they are located, Broadband Voice finds its customers the best solution thanks to its partnering agreements with various companies. Then, when the internet is experiencing issues, Broadband Voice actually takes on the responsibility to call the internet provider and solve the issue.

Broadband Voice can even monitor a customer’s internet service, detecting a problem before the customer realizes there is one. Johns recalled a recent situation where Broadband Voice noticed that a customer’s internet bandwidth was really stretched during the hours of 1 to 4 p.m. every day. After investigating, they realized an employee of the company was frequently streaming videos in the office, minimizing capacity for other users, so Broadband Voice alerted the customer and solved the problem.

With exceptional customer service like this, Broadband Voice knows its future is bright and plans to continue expanding nationally. Thanks to a significant number of relationships with technology partners across the country, the company is willing to bundle solutions – including services for both voice and data – regardless of the location of the customer or how many sites it has. For instance, if a customer with 50 sites throughout the United States wants to partner with Broadband Voice, the company can work with local providers in each location to provide data, overlay the voice and manage all of it for the customer.

“The business world is always changing,” said Watts. “And as a progressive company, we have to stay one step ahead to accommodate the business of the future. We have a

solution flexible enough to bring advanced VoIP technology to rural environments, yet scalable enough for multi-campus businesses with locations across the United States.” ●



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Visit www.voice.ms for more information.

