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White Paper

The Newton County Board of Commissioners:
Engagement to lower costs and improve service

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Introduction

Faced with a sharp reduction in tax receipts, The Newton County Government Board of Commissioners tasked their departments to investigate and report on any means to lower existing expenses and infrastructure costs. A commissioner on the board suggested an outside firm review and audit the county's telecom invoices. This led to a discussion between the county and Abilita. Abilita presented our process, as well as expectations that might result from an engagement, to the Board. After meeting with the IT team, the county Finance Director and then presenting to the Board of Commissioners, the county moved forward with Abilita in an effort to optimize costs.

Initial Engagement

Abilita's engagement has three phases. The initial phase is to learn how the county uses telecommunications services, and conduct a forensic audit of all telecom and IT related services. This results in Phase 1, a report and corresponding read-out of our findings. Phase 2 is the implementation of any recommendations. Phase 3 completes a study validating accuracy of new billing and discount structure.

Phase 1

Phase 1 started with the collection of the county's invoice/usage activity for dedicated and analog voice services, long distance, wireless devices, support agreements, internet and WAN network. The county's voice and data network configuration is broken out by four main sites and 54 satellite locations, as well as over 250 mobile devices. Almost all of this data we obtained directly from telecom vendors. The Abilita team then loaded this data into a software program completing a master inventory of services. Over the next month, Abilita conducted a detailed analysis of services and providers identifying how the county might optimize its network and/or vendors to lower costs. This effort includes reviewing invoices for accuracy, reviewing contract status and compliance, and studying what features are in use compared to business needs (landline and wireless) and assessing alternative providers' services and pricing. After completing the audit, Abilita scheduled and presented the findings to the Finance Director, County Commissioner and then to the entire Board of Commissioners. Abilita then presented its findings and process to department heads to provide a level of confidence on how changes would impact their teams.

Phase 2

After presenting the findings, the board moved to vote on our recommendations and accepted all of them. The Abilita team developed a project plan to complete the updates and worked with the County's IT team to begin the process. The bulk of the savings came from changing their Local

Service provider, Long Distance provider, equipment support provider, optimizing wireless services, executing a new, negotiated agreement for Internet and updating the features on the Centrex lines.

The implementation of the new Local Service provider was the most significant in terms of customer real time involvement. The migration was broken out into two days. The main building had two PRI's (Local Service lines) and the Sherriff's department had one PRI. The new LD service flowed with the PRI changes.

The Internet optimization was a function of renegotiating the contract for services. The County's support of equipment was provided by the incumbent PRI provider and was not a competitively priced product. A new, national provider was brought in for a significant reduction in cost.

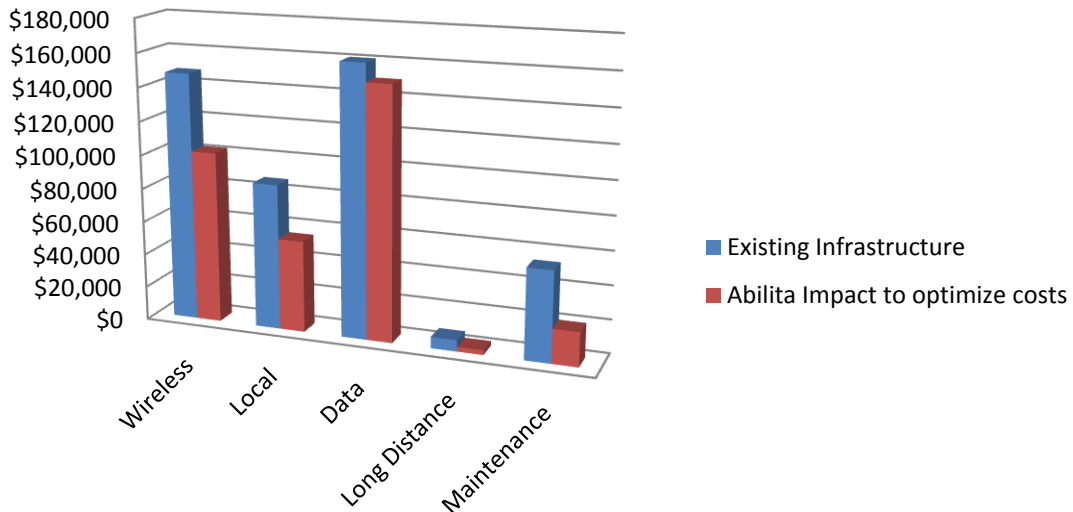
The County's configuration called for the continued use of Centrex lines at some locations. Abilita studied all of the line costs and features and then optimized both.

The County had a number of wireless devices, comprised of data cards, smart phones and non-smart phones. The team worked with the incumbent provider to optimize their plans, providing significant reduction in costs.

Phase 3

Management and completion of the updates and changes took place over the course of about three months. During that time and subsequently, Abilita worked closely with the suppliers to validate and ensure accurate pricing. In this case, most of the pricing was updated accurately, however a couple of services did not and we worked to get this corrected. The wireless updates were completed quickly, and the corresponding billing changes were implemented on-time. However, Abilita did have to wait about two billing cycles for the provider to post credits as a result of prior billing errors.

Cost Benefits - Annual Expense



Ongoing Engagement

Abilita's process, under a contingency engagement, provides ongoing support for its clients. With multiple platforms, we regularly analyze our clients' invoice activity, validate accurate billing every period and report on those findings. This also allows us to identify new ways to improve the cost structure as both costs change and usage evolves.

Wireless is the most fluid of services that Abilita manages. By engaging with our clients, Abilita continues to monitor and update the wireless portfolio to take advantage of the most recent billing options and ensure that the mix of devices and plans is optimal. Additionally, the Abilita team advocates for our clients with their service providers, providing a comprehensive vendor management solution. Working with Abilita, rather than directly with your vendors, will save your team valuable time.

Conclusion

The engagement with The Newton County Board of Commissioners is a successful one. Measured by savings realized, heightened level of support and an ongoing validation process, the positive results are measurably successful. The telecom audit, from start to implementation of recommendations, was completed within a year. However, the county now enjoys a lower cost structure that will keep downward pressure on costs going forward. The biggest challenge with this effort was timing and managing the fact that multiple constitutional offices were impacted. The implementation for the most part went smoothly, and where there were challenges, we ran point to get them resolved quickly.

When an organization is serious about accessing ways to streamline costs, the Abilita solution can be a key component. Often, expenses as a standalone issue are not the driving factor to engage Abilita. Issues such as new technology, contract status and vendor performance are issues that get a dialogue started. Abilita brings an independent, vendor neutral perspective to solutions emphasizing what is best in your environment and best meets the needs of the business.

The recommendations Abilita implemented for Newton County were customized for their environment. Factors such as current and alternative providers, performance and cost considerations drove the discussion and ultimate decisions on network architecture. The recommendations were presented as a set of alternative options the county was provided in an effort to lower operating costs and optimize services. The recommendations and cost/network optimization for your organization will be 100% specific to your environment and organizational needs. No two engagements are the same.

Abilita telecommunications consultants provide full service telecom consulting solutions for clients across North America who are looking to achieve greater cost efficiencies and improved performance for all of their telecom needs and projects – **voice, data, wireless and IT related equipment.**



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