

Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2 Customer Solution Case Study



Customer: Connexus Energy
Website: www.connexusenergy.com
Customer Size: 251 employees
Country or Region: United States
Industry: Utilities—Power utilities
Partner: Avtex
Partner Website: www.avtex.com

Customer Profile

Headquartered in Ramsey, Minnesota, Connexus Energy is the state's largest electric cooperative. Owned by its 125,000 customers, the company earned U.S.\$211 million in revenue in 2009.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2
 - Microsoft Office Outlook 2007
- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Windows Server 2008 R2 Standard
 - Microsoft Exchange Server 2010 Standard
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2008 R2 Standard
- Microsoft Visual Studio 2010 Premium
- Technologies
 - Microsoft .NET Framework 3.5
 - Microsoft Silverlight 4
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2008 R2 Reporting Services
 - Microsoft Unified Communications Managed API 2.0

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Electric Company Boosts Efficiency and Cuts Costs with an Automated Dispatch Solution

“With our communications-enabled business process solution based on Office Communications Server 2007 R2, we can focus on the power outage rather than the dispatch process.”

Jon Rono, Leader, Business Technology Services, Connexus Energy

Connexus Energy needed to speed the dispatching of its electrical line workers. To do so, the company implemented a communications-enabled business process solution from Avtex built with Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2. As a result, Connexus can reduce crew dispatch time during significant events by 83 percent, cut annual IT costs by more than U.S.\$10,000, boost customer satisfaction, and facilitate a significant return on investment.

Business Needs

Minnesota utility company Connexus Energy wanted to reduce the time it took to contact and assemble electrical line workers. When a power outage occurred, a Connexus system operator had to simultaneously collect information about the cause and location, manage incoming calls from customers, and contact line workers to see who could help. If a widespread outage occurred outside business hours, when only one operator was working, Connexus had additional operators come into the office.

Even with multiple people contacting line

workers, the process for assembling a crew was complex and frequently took 60 to 90 minutes—especially if 20 or more line workers were needed. An operator could contact only one employee at a time. Operators chose who to call based on employees' expertise, seniority, and the last shift worked. If an employee was not immediately available, the operator noted that information and called later. Tracking all of these variables hindered operator productivity. Phone conversations and misdialed numbers also added time. To address these challenges, Connexus sought an affordable interactive voice response (IVR) solution that was easy to

customize.

Solution

After reviewing various technologies, Connexus chose to implement a Microsoft Unified Communications solution proposed by Avtex, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner. More than just an IVR system, the customizable, dispatch workflow solution would use Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2. As a result, it could support unified communications capabilities such as voice over IP, instant messaging (IM), presence, and conferencing. The solution would also include Microsoft Exchange Server 2010 Standard with Microsoft Office Outlook 2007 messaging and collaboration client for integrated email and calendaring.

In January 2010, Avtex began working with Connexus to create the solution. To customize it, developers used tools that included the Microsoft .NET Framework 3.5, C#, Microsoft Visual Studio 2010 Premium, Microsoft Silverlight 4 browser plug-in, and Microsoft Unified Communications Managed API 2.0. Connexus began using the new dispatch application in July, 2010.

When a power outage occurs, an operator opens the application through a web-based interface and enters a brief description of the incident. The operator also indicates how many line workers are needed, with which skill set, and by what time. To initiate the dispatch process, the operator simply enters crew requirements and clicks the Start button. The application then accesses the contact rules—and information about employees such as skill set—in a database supported by Microsoft SQL Server 2008 R2 Standard data management software and the Windows Server 2008 R2 Standard operating system. It compares the rules with employee information—including phone numbers and availability—contained in

employees' calendars in Office Outlook 2007. The application then uses Office Communications Server 2007 R2 to place an automated call to the appropriate employees. To respond to a call, each person uses his or her telephone keypad.

For each incident, Microsoft SQL Server 2008 R2 Reporting Services records who was called and their response. The dispatch application stores this information in the database and also sends it to management in an email message using Exchange Server 2010.

To accelerate deployment and minimize up-front investments, Avtex is hosting the first phase of the solution, which it delivers as a cloud service. In 2011, Connexus can move the dispatch system on-site and then replace its existing voice-mail system with capabilities in Exchange Server 2010. The company also plans to use Database Availability Groups in Exchange Server 2010 to reduce costs for email data replication and to facilitate high availability for email services.

Benefits

With its new solution, Connexus can accelerate its response to power outages, increase customer satisfaction, minimize costs, and realize a significant return on investment (ROI).

Speeds Dispatch Times by 83 Percent

Today, Connexus operators can dispatch line workers from the office or their home in just 10 minutes—an 83 percent improvement. They can also focus on speaking with customers and gathering information about the outage. In addition, the new system never dials incorrectly. "With our communications-enabled business process solution based on Office Communications Server 2007 R2, we can

focus on the power outage rather than the dispatch process," explains Jon Rono, Leader of Business Technology Services at Connexus Energy. "Operators no longer have to put a lot of time and energy into assembling the right crew. The system calls the right people simultaneously."

Reduces Costs and Increases ROI

Because employees can work more efficiently, Connexus can realize significant ROI by boosting service reliability, enhancing customer satisfaction, and decreasing operational expenses. For example, with the new solution, the company can cut its yearly licensing and IT maintenance costs by more than \$10,000. "Our business process solution can give us a single platform for all of our electronic communications including voice mail, email, and IM," says Rono. "As a result, we can eliminate third-party products and cut costs. I don't have a large IT staff, so reducing the number of disparate products we have to support really simplifies our job and reduces training."

The new solution also gives management greater insight into operations, which facilitates efficiency and additional savings. "Managers can instantly see who was contacted, who accepted the calls, who worked, and for how long," explains Rono.

Supports Future Innovation

The solution is easy to customize and expand so Connexus can adapt it to meet changing requirements and offer employees new features. "With Office Communications Server 2007 R2 and Exchange Server 2010, we can implement true unified communications," says Rono. "Our solution is also flexible enough to support additional areas of our business so we can reuse our investment in new ways, and by doing so, minimize costs."