

City of Kentwood Prepares for Future Growth and Services with Next-Generation Communications System



Kentwood Then

- Their legacy PBX-based communications system was costing the City of Kentwood too much money in terms of long-distance fees and support costs
- The absence of a mobile, unified communications platform was negatively impacting productivity and collaboration
- The legacy communications system was also costing Kentwood its competitive advantage, as prospective citizens and businesses were turned off by the lack of a modern communications infrastructure

Kentwood Now

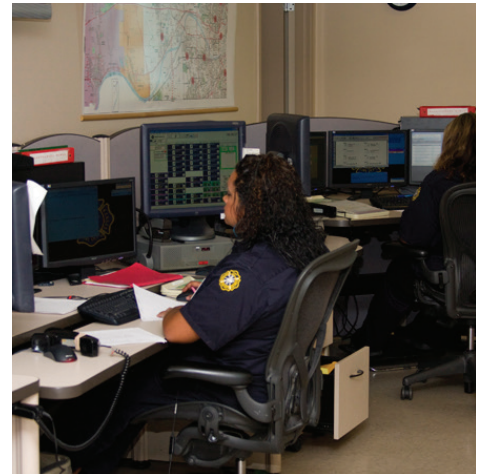
- The city is saving substantial amounts on long-distance charges and communications maintenance costs through IP-based communications
- City workers are far more productive, thanks to easy-to-use videoconferencing, broad support for mobile devices, and unified communications (voicemail/email/desktop sharing) through Microsoft Lync
- Citizens receive real-time alerts on their mobile devices for school closures, emergencies and more

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The Via Group, Sonus and Microsoft Put Mobile, Unified Communications to Work for City of 50,000

Small cities like Kentwood, Michigan, are the cornerstone of the future as more people move into urban areas each year. Yet the migration of citizens into urban areas is also driving the need for new enhanced service capabilities, and creating more competition between large and small cities for businesses, tourists and residents. As Kentwood has discovered, competing with big-city services and conveniences can be a challenge on a small-city budget. In order to help small cities like Kentwood stay competitive and embrace innovation, Microsoft has launched the CityNext program to connect cities with certified solutions integrators and technology products from Microsoft's rich ecosystem of partners.

It was through the CityNext program that the City of Kentwood discovered the technology they needed to bring their city into the 21st century and the partner to help them do it, The Via Group, based in The Woodlands, Texas. For Kentwood, the connection couldn't have come at a better time: The city was currently struggling with a legacy communications system that was fast becoming a maintenance and support liability. The city's phone and email systems were based on older technology that was expensive to maintain, and lacked the modern features to support next-gen communications channels such as social media and smartphones. Instead, the city conducted business much as it had in the past century, with fixed office phones and face-to-face meetings. This traditional approach to communications was costing the city money in terms of long-distance phone charges and travel costs. More importantly, their outdated communications system was costing them their competitive advantage. Existing and prospective businesses and citizens sought a more modern communications infrastructure that supported their own expectations for mobile, real-time communications and information



that enhanced the overall civilian experience of city-provided services such as police, fire, parks and recreation and day-to-day city governance

For A City On The Go, Old Technology Must Go Too

Modern cities are run much like a business. And, just like businesses, many cities use mobile and unified communications technologies to reduce costs, increase government employee productivity, and enhance the effectiveness of community support services. For cities, however, the stakes can be considerably higher. When sales and accounting don't communicate effectively, it's a problem; when the police and fire departments don't communicate effectively, it's an emergency. Yet for all the modern advances made in next-gen communication platforms in the last ten years, the city of Kentwood was largely operating the same as it had ten years ago:

- Phone systems were still using legacy PBXs and the PSTN, incurring high local and long-distance charges;

- Government employees could not route office or outside civil service calls to their mobile phones, or access office or government data systems securely on their mobile devices;
- Employees spent hours driving to and sitting in meetings because their legacy videoconferencing solution was costly, cumbersome and complex to use for scheduled or recurring departmental meetings, and did not support their mobile devices.

The city's IT department recognized that SIP-based Unified Communications technology could bring their citywide network into the 21st century. The challenge would be in the migration of their legacy system to a reliable communications platform that would be robust enough to grow with their city services infrastructure, yet simple enough to use each and every day. After evaluating different technologies, the City of Kentwood selected Microsoft Exchange and Microsoft Lync as the future platform for the city's communications and information system, and gave The Via Group the go-ahead to make it happen.

The Next Step? The Via Group Leads The Way.

Microsoft Lync had everything that the City of Kentwood needed in a single communications platform: voice, video conferencing, desktop sharing, unified email and Instant Messaging. Better still, all of these Lync features and functionality would be available on any government-issued laptop or authorized mobile device. What Kentwood lacked was the expertise and available internal IT personnel to lead the network migration and implementation of Lync and Exchange. And that's where The Via Group proved vital. As Greg Maynard, The Via Group's service lead and project manager on the account, recalls: "The City of Kentwood was understandably nervous about moving to Microsoft Lync, because they had been using their previous legacy system for so long that there was a strong comfort factor to it. Our first goal was to make them feel even more comfortable

with the new technological direction they were taking by showing them how easy it was to use Lync and how much it could do for them in enhancing their communications and collaboration needs."

Initially, The Via Group built a proof-of-concept to demonstrate the Lync and Exchange capabilities in a safe environment, where the City of Kentwood's IT team could test the new solution and kick the tires with a steel-tipped boot. After the internal IT team was satisfied that Lync and Exchange could do everything they needed it to do, The Via Group began implementing the next-gen communications and collaboration platform in a phased project plan and migration. Progressing in phases was done to reduce the potential for disruption to critical city services such as police, fire, hospital and school communications. Throughout the project, The Via Group worked closely with the city's internal IT team to integrate the new platform with the existing technology that would be carried over, such as existing contact centers, Interactive Voice Response (IVR) systems, analog communications devices and legacy databases. Within six months, The Via Group had deployed the new communications and collaboration platform across all city departments and regions, with no outages and no disruptions reported.

Securing a Better Future

A critical component in Unified Communications is the session border controller (SBC), which protects SIP-based networks against attacks (similar to a firewall), encrypts communications for privacy, enforces policy information such as identities and access, routes calls to the right destination, and enables different devices to talk together using SIP as the foundation. With so much riding on the role, security and networking handshake of the SBC, The Via Group chose SBC solutions from Sonus Networks to provide secure, seamless communications on the new Microsoft platform. The Sonus SBC was both Lync-certified and could support

a wide range of devices and technologies, enabling the City of Kentwood to integrate their new communications system with both legacy and next-gen devices.

For the City of Kentwood, it's very important that their communications system works flawlessly; that calls get routed quickly and correctly, that voice quality is good, and that services such as voicemail and call forwarding work as expected. With the Sonus SBC, Kentwood has the assurance that their network can do all of these things, and do them consistently even under emergency situations when session volume is extremely high. "Sonus SBCs have demonstrated time and time again that they are able to stand up to heavy call volumes without blinking," says Greg Maynard, Unified Communications Specialist at The Via Group. "It's nice to be able to tell a customer that they can rely on their network because they're using the same SBC technology as the world's leading telecommunications networks."

Kentwood Connects with Innovation... and Savings

Today, the City of Kentwood is a model of communications efficiency. City employees travel less and collaborate more through Lync-based videoconferencing and desktop sharing, saving employees hours every week and, more importantly, enabling the city to allocate more of its budget to citizen-facing improvements. With the combined Microsoft and Sonus solution set designed and engineered by The Via Group, Kentwood is the very model of a modern city when it comes to communications and collaboration:

- Real-time alerts are sent to mobile phones for school closures and emergencies;
- Workers check email, voicemail and IM texts from a single screen on their mobile device;

- On-the-fly videoconferences and desktop sharing replace costly on-site, face-to-face meetings;
- Information flows seamlessly and securely across and through all city departments, reducing the time it takes to process paperwork and make decisions.

The City of Kentwood estimates the new combined Microsoft and Sonus communications solution will significantly reduce the city's recurring operational service costs such as long-distance, third-party PBX support and conferencing charges. The most important savings, however, may be the number of hours that employees **don't** spend driving to off-site meetings and switching between different

voicemail, email and IM applications to stay connected in the office and on the go through mobility. "We've become efficiency experts virtually overnight with the solution that The Via Group has designed and built for us," says Bill Dudgeon, Information Systems Manager for the City of Kentwood. "Our city counts on us to leverage technology to improve the quality of their lives, and we feel as though Microsoft Lync not only brings us together as an organization, but brings us closer together as a community."

About Sonus Networks

Sonus Networks, Inc. is a leader in IP networking with proven expertise in delivering secure, reliable and scalable next-generation infrastructure and subscriber solutions. Sonus products include session border controllers, policy/routing servers, and media and signaling gateways. In 2012, Sonus launched its Partner Assure program to provide turnkey sales support and training to authorized resellers around the world. To date, more than 100 companies have joined the Partner Assure program. For more information, visit www.sonus.net.

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