



A case study on how Hart Telephone Company (HTC) was able to maximize efficiencies by integrating NISC's iVUE AppSuite into operational systems across their organization.

Right on the Georgia/South Carolina border, about 2 hours northeast of Atlanta, lies Hart County. A picturesque manmade lake named Lake Hartwell is the community's centerpiece, where members go to relax and have fun. Historically, it's had a small-town vibe.

When Covid hit in 2019 and the world locked down, people started working remotely and many Americans in big cities decided to move to less densely populated, more picturesque locations. Hart County was one such place to experience this influx, a trend that continues to this day.

Hart County's median income is also on the rise. New restaurants, shops, and hotspots are opening where the growing community lives, works, and plays. And in today's rapidly expanding digital society, this all adds up to a massive opportunity for broadband providers in the area to build out the infrastructure required for this growing demand, including Hart Telephone Company (HTC).

The company's President, Randy Daniel, embodies the company's mission, which has remained the same since 1903: to serve their community by providing the absolute latest in communication technology to every member possible. He recognized the opportunity as soon as it arose. But he also knew that seizing it with HTC's current systems in place would require double the workload, at the very least, and was bound to increase even more in the future.

And that's when Daniel realized: if HTC was to persist in its century-old mission, the company was going to have to make a lot of changes to keep up.



Integrate All Systems Across the Organization

Many of HTC's operating systems had been in place for years, even decades in some cases. But in 2011, Daniel learned that their billing software vendor, Quintrex, was being acquired by National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC).

Daniel also knew that NISC offered iVUE AppSuite (AppSuite), a mobile tool that extends NISC solutions beyond the desktop, connecting processes between the office and the field to dramatically streamline efficiencies. Since they were going to be using NISC for their billing anyway, Daniel decided to take the plunge.

HTC went live with NISC's Financials solution in 2014. Over the next few years, they continued to add more NISC solutions, including Mapping and Staking and the Work Management Solutions, which includes the scheduler application. As they continued to build out their system, they continued to hone each solution to enable them to communicate with each other in real time.

Once AppSuite was up and running, HTC executives consulted with experts from NISC, who conducted audits on two departments: dispatch and accounting. They spoke at length with employees to get a thorough understanding of how HTC was utilizing AppSuite. They also invited HTC executives to explore how other departments were using NISC solutions.

Throughout the entire audit process, it became clear that HTC was missing many opportunities to create efficiencies. Daniel knew that in order to maximize efficiency they would have to make changes to their workflows. He also knew that asking employees to change systems they had been using for decades would be a daunting task.

That's when he turned to Melissa Green, HTC's CFO.

"We can't expect our customers to embrace change if we're not willing to embrace it ourselves."

~ Melissa Green, CFO

Shift Culture to Thrive on Change

Green had been at the company for 13 years when Daniel came to her with the task. "I knew it was going to be a struggle," she recalls. "I knew I was going to make people mad, and I knew that I was going to be looked at as the bad guy."

But like Daniel, Green is also dedicated to the company's mission. So, she developed a plan and got to work.

"We made some very drastic changes in about a 3 month time span."

~ Melissa Green, CFO

STEP 1: LISTEN

For the first week, Green had candid discussions with employees in the dispatch center and the front office, asking open-ended questions, listening carefully to their answers and taking copious notes to gather as much information as possible about day-to-day workflows.

STEP 2: STRATEGIZE

Next, Green took that information and compared it to the information NISC's experts had provided during their audit. In doing so, a simple yet huge opportunity to gain real efficiencies presented itself: go paperless.

Prior to fully utilizing AppSuite, dispatch and customer service communicated via paper. Orders were captured in one office, printed and faxed in another, processed by hand then passed to technicians who then had no access to any real-time data about the order that might have changed while the paper trail was circulating.

If HTC focused on paperless solutions through AppSuite, customer service would be able to schedule installations on that very first call. If the customer called in at the last minute to cancel, technicians would know right away, avoiding unnecessary trips. There was no doubt that using AppSuite to go paperless would not only eradicate company-wide inefficiencies, but it would also greatly improve customer satisfaction and eliminate a great deal of employee frustration.

STEP 3: SELL

To convince hesitant employees, Green used their own words from the notes she took during those initial discussions to quote grievances and explain precisely how the new workflows would solve issues they had. Then, she asked employees to simply use the new systems for one full week to the best of their ability. If they still had doubts, they could discuss how to proceed.

The employees agreed, and the whole company got to work.

Regularly Hone Processes to Keep Pace with Demand

After the one-week trial period, not one employee wanted to go back to paper.

By August 2019, HTC had fully transitioned multiple operations to AppSuite. Since then, the company has experienced real bottom-line gains thanks to numerous efficiencies achieved, including:

- 32% reduction in abandon call rate
- 17% reduction in the average number of days to complete a service order
- 5% reduction in the average time to repair a trouble ticket
- 55% reduction in trouble tickets that require a truck roll to correct an issue

Using AppSuite on iPads, HTC's technicians are now empowered to access service orders, view maps, fill out and approve timesheets and more, from wherever they are, putting them more in control of their schedules and workflow. Employees across every department now know what their days or even weeks will look like, alleviating stress and boosting morale.

"To me," Green asserts, "that has been just as huge as any financial savings that we have seen," pointing out that not only are employees happy, but they are also more productive, fulfilled and motivated.

Customer satisfaction is up as well. Orders are filled at the pace HTC's growing community expects in today's rapid-fire world. Questions or concerns are addressed more quickly. Customers can also take advantage of iVUE SmartHub, a separate customer-facing app and online portal that allows them to pay bills, increase bandwidth, report service interruptions and access customer service right from their phones.

There's no doubt that HTC has seen real growth across its entire organization since transitioning operations to AppSuite. Green also points out that if HTC hadn't done it by 2019 before Covid hit, they might have had to shutter their doors.

Instead, they were able to hit the ground running, working through the pandemic as the community began to grow. And thanks to the modular nature of AppSuite, they're now able to keep pace with the growth of today – and the growth that is sure to continue in the years to come.

"The efficiencies are just mind blowing from where we used to be."

~ Melissa Green, CFO

Build Strong Partnerships to Navigate Future Progress

HTC continues to partner with NISC on an ongoing basis. This year's focus is enabling their customers to access more data and have more control – another feature society at large has come to expect. Their next area of focus will become apparent through the intelligence backed by real-time data they share through AppSuite.

"Their support is outstanding," Green certifies. "There has not been one person that I have worked with at NISC from day one that I have not been impressed by the knowledge they bring to the table."

NISC is likewise invested in HTC's success. "NISC's mission is to help organizations like HTC succeed, so that their communities can succeed," says Doug Remboldt, NISC's President and CEO.

When asked what she'd say to fellow providers considering a partnership with NISC, Green remarked: "Absolutely do it. Like all new things, there will be a learning curve and some resistance to change. However, the efficiencies gained more than outweigh those challenges."

If you would like to learn more about NISC's iVUE AppSuite and how it can transform your company's workflows, we invite you to visit nisc.coop/the-nisc-enterprise-system/enterprise/ or contact us at 866.999.6472.

"I think (NISC) is a leader in innovation in our industry, and I couldn't recommend them any more highly than I do."

~ Melissa Green, CFO