



Improving CX and Efficiency Through Smart Solutions and Partnership

Silver Star: Searching for a partner

With a more than 100-year history serving eastern Idaho and western Wyoming, Silver Star Communications is a broadband industry trendsetter, often leading the way toward innovation and the future. When they identified a need to upgrade their systems and modernize their technical support, billing, and other software, they vetted several organizations. Silver Star wanted to partner with a company that could provide a single platform for multiple integration solutions rather than searching for different vendors to fill various needs. National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC) had everything they were looking for. Silver Star President Barbara Sessions says, “NISC offered a broad catalog of integration opportunities that we didn’t have before. It was one of the factors that drove us toward them. Having the ability to work with leaders at NISC to figure out integration opportunities—alongside companies like Calix—has helped make us better as an organization.”



As a company dedicated to innovation in the broadband industry, Silver Star has a proud history of generating its own ideas. They needed a partner flexible and powerful enough to build something with them instead of merely for them. Part of the vetting process, therefore, included finding out how various vendors had partnered with other broadband providers in the past. “NISC was very transparent during the proposal process, encouraging us to work with other users and get recommendations for making the transition smooth,” says Sessions.

Beyond software and products, Silver Star also wanted a true partner, a company that would listen carefully to their needs and ideas and work together to create the right tools, rather than offer a one-size-fits-all solution. “We wanted a partner that was willing to listen to us, let us explain where we wanted to grow our business, see our vision, and jump in and help us achieve it,” says Sessions. “We vetted several vendors and landed on NISC because their team and their staff were willing to help us grow and develop our business on our end, while giving us guidance on industry best practices.”

Making the conversion to NISC

During what is now two years of partnership, Silver Star has adopted several NISC solutions, including:

- iVUE AppSuite
- Provisioning
- Business Intelligence & Reporting
- Customer Care & Billing
- Multi-Channel Messenger
- iVUE Connect Marketing
- Document Management
- NISC's Financials platform
- SmartHub
- NISC's Mapping and Staking
- And more

Silver Star's "all-in" approach to NISC means they are taking full advantage of the tools and integrations NISC offers. Despite the large suite of software Silver Star has adopted—which could present a daunting learning curve—Silver Star Technical Support Supervisor Jennifer Astle says her team was well supported. "The amount of training NISC provided and how willing they were to be on board with our whole team effort was amazing."

"Silver Star was NISC's first virtual conversion—because of COVID—and I didn't see that the support level was any less," added Sessions.



A true partnership for game-changing results

While all-virtual conversion projects posed unique challenges, Silver Star's pre-conversion preparation and positive mindset going into the project made for a successful outcome, according to NISC Vice President of Sales, Service & Marketing Ed Wolff.

"Barb, Jennifer and the rest of the Silver Star team were fully engaged and present throughout the conversion process to start our partnership off on a fantastic note," says Wolff.

While the vetting and conversion processes were smooth, it's the results of Silver Star's partnership with NISC that tell the true story. The tools Silver Star now uses to serve customers and run their internal systems demonstrate the power of this partnership. The following statistics, experiences, and anecdotes explain the breadth of the positive changes Silver Star has seen.

Improving the customer experience

- Silver Star's ability to solve customer problems is improving with NISC's tools:
 - » Ticket resolution rates are 83%, up from about 70% before NISC.
 - » Silver Star's first-call resolution rate is about 77%, up from 65%.
 - » Calls related to billing and disconnects are down from around 25 per month to around five.
 - » With the ability to look up customers in SmartHub, average call times are five minutes or less (down from around nine minutes).

Putting more control in customers' hands

- 56% of Silver Star's customers now use autopay via SmartHub. Autopay reduces support calls and customer frustration related to billing issues. It has also improved customers' perception of Silver Star, resulting in fewer disconnects.
- The visibility customers now have to their own data, via SmartHub, has enhanced the customer experience. Customers can create their own trouble tickets, which is convenient for them and reduces call volume for Silver Star.
- Customers who are disconnected due to nonpayment can resume their service automatically through SmartHub, even on the weekends when Silver Star's offices are closed.

Improving internal efficiency and capabilities

- Astle reports that the efficiency of Silver Star's technical support department has improved dramatically. "(iVUE) AppSuite is really helpful for the technicians in the field," she says. "Dispatching a ticket is much more efficient. There's less touch required from us—we add a workflow to the ticket and our techs are automatically notified and the ticket is added to their queue. The tech adds notes, so when a customer calls about a tech visit we have more visibility into who was there, what they did, and so on." In the past, when a technical problem reoccurred for a customer, several emails went back and forth among the Silver Star team to determine who worked on the issue and redeploy their team. Now, they simply reopen a ticket, which is added to the original technician's queue.
- This ticket tracking gives Silver Star's management a clear picture of where team members may need additional training if an issue is not fixed properly the first time.
- Common tasks like reconnects, service cuts, creating service orders, and updating records can now be handled in bulk, rather than one at a time. "The number of nonpayment tickets we've had to touch have gone from 150 to 200 down to maybe 10 that we have to push through individually," Astle reports.
- Silver Star now uses iVUE AppSuite to approve timesheets and time off requests, resulting in reporting efficiencies and more accurate data.
- By virtue of using a common system to track tickets, departments have more visibility into each other's work processes. Consequently, Silver Star as an organization is less siloed than it was before partnering with NISC.

Stories of changed lives

- Sessions reports overhearing a gathering of senior citizens who were talking about the convenience of paying their internet bill online. It goes to show, she says, that though we sometimes think our elders prefer the old ways—in this case, writing and mailing checks—they want the convenience of modern technology as much as we all do.
- The Silver Star employee who processes the company's outgoing checks recently became a grandmother. Before the conversion to NISC, she had stacks and stacks of checks to process. Thanks to RemitPlus, a comprehensive paper check scanning and payment posting solution available through NISC's partnership with ProfitStars®, the amount of time needed to manage checks has gone down so much that she has decided to reduce her hours so she can spend every Friday with her grandbaby.
- NISC's Financials platform has increased the efficiency of Silver Star's accounting department so much that the department is now beta-testing an organizational change: working four 10-hour shifts rather than five eight-hour shifts. Thanks to the NISC system, no one has noticed the change in the accounting department's schedules.



Support from a true partner

Silver Star reports high satisfaction with NISC's Service Center support portal. "NISC has been incredibly responsive," says Astle. "I've never had to wait more than five minutes for a response from their team. They are on the spot; you're not left waiting. Their responsiveness is a big deal. It doesn't slow us down—I've been very impressed." Silver Star values being able to submit tickets online, seeing a visual of the support journey, and having access to a live status of each service request.

- At a higher level, Silver Star's leadership team feels free to reach out to NISC leadership. "If we have an idea about feature upgrades, we can reach out to any level of the organization," says Sessions. "They are responsive and listen to our ideas and concerns."



Moving forward, together

NISC and Silver Star are at the beginning of what promises to be a long and beneficial relationship.

"We value our partnership with Silver Star for a number of reasons, one being the honest and transparent collaboration we have with them," says Wolff. "They are quick to provide us helpful and constructive feedback that helps improve our service to both them and the entire NISC Membership."

Silver Star anticipates a continued close partnership with NISC as Silver Star continues to be an industry leader. "We're pushing the envelope, ahead of some of our peers," says Sessions. "We love being part of beta testing and improvement processes. NISC gives us the opportunity to do that, to drive new and innovative ways to do things in the industry."

Opportunities for innovation is just one of the many benefits Silver Star is finding in this growing partnership. "NISC was the right decision for us. We continue to feel that way even two years in."

About NISC

NISC has been providing technology solutions to the utility and broadband industries for more than 50 years. NISC is committed to research, development, and quality of the latest in technology to ensure its solutions can not only solve today's challenges, but are positioned to solve tomorrow's as well.

