

Remote Operators Save Space and Provide High Quality Service

Case Study

At a glance

Key Metric

Results of transitioning to a remote workforce:

- ↓ Decreased number of sick days taken.
- ↑ Increased operator schedule flexibility.
- ↑ Increased number of job applicants.

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CHALLENGES

1

The need to expand a hospital system's call center but lacking the physical space to do so.

2

Managing the growing pains, hiring, and training of new staff.

SOLUTIONS

- Upgrade to software platform that could accommodate remote agents while providing a better patient experience.
- Remote monitoring and real-time call stats and reporting help manage mobile staff.

CUSTOMER QUOTE

"The number of caller complaints have dropped drastically since switching to Amtelco's call center software."

Call Center Manager

For some hospitals, having enough space to operate efficiently is an issue. One of the most significant advantages of the Amtelco platform is that it allows operators to work from home, making the space otherwise taken up by an on-site call center available for other uses.

A Midwestern hospital was faced with the issue of wanting to expand but not wishing to reconstruct its facilities. The hospital call center manager commented, "One of the biggest issues for us is that they built this hospital not knowing it would expand as fast as it did. We have a huge space issue here."

Even before the pandemic, the hospital's transcriptionists worked from home. Their ability to work remotely made the call center manager wonder if her department could have the same capabilities. She continued, "When we were looking at software for our call center, one of the things we wanted was to be able to have our agents work from home. Our space is just so tight in all of our facilities."

Ensuring Staff Safety

Before making the final decision on the operators' new location, the hospital looked into other possibilities. "We had the option of moving to other locations, but because there was only someone there during the day, the staff felt unsafe. We also looked at another one of our facilities, but that location couldn't handle the call volume," said the manager.

It wasn't an overnight decision, but after careful consideration, it was determined that working from home would be the best and safest option for the operators, especially during the night hours.

Selecting the Right Staff

Not all operators were given the opportunity to work from home. "It takes a certain type of person to do this, and we needed to determine who could and wouldn't. We were looking for quality staff."

Each operator's annual performance reviews were analyzed before deciding who would be offered the remote operator positions. These evaluations included technical components that looked at the operator's job competencies, such as how well they could handle emergency calls, perform paging and overhead paging functions, handle calls from physicians and patients, and differentiate between routine calls and emergency calls.



The hospital also reviewed behavioral competencies, which included the operator's commitment to service, quality of service, productivity, and teamwork skills. Each operator's call volume, length of time spent on calls, and how often they logged in and out.

Preliminary Testing

Great care was taken in the implementation of staff working remotely. After selecting the operators that would work from home, the manager and another staff member tested the remote operator stations for about a month. This helped them know exactly what the operators would be experiencing from home. The manager commented, "We wanted to make sure this would work. Once we knew that it would work, we gave the operators home computers to use, and we were able to get them up and running. I gradually added more people."

Staff Schedules

When on-site, the operators typically worked eight-hour shifts. After reviewing the various reports when the operators started working from home, including wait times and dropped calls, it was decided that longer shifts would better meet the hospital's call handling needs. "We created ten-hour shifts, and each operator's performance determined their place. As a result, my strong employees work during the busiest times, from Monday through Thursday. The employees at the next level work Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and the ones that weren't high performers ended up on the night shift." The lunch shifts of the operators were also adjusted after finding that too many operators weren't handling calls during some of the busier times.

Home Setup

For this particular Midwestern hospital, 16 operators are working from home. Each agent was given a computer, a phone, and Internet access for handling calls.

Before being allowed to work from home, each operator was required to sign an agreement that included things like eliminating background noise, requirements to report to the hospital in case of a cable or power outage, attending staff meetings, returning equipment



immediately upon leaving, providing an appropriate work area for themselves, and bringing equipment in for upgrades or repairs. Many operators designated a room in their home for handling calls to help eliminate background noise and to help them stay focused.

The operators can handle all types of calls, including code calls and overhead pages—all as if they were on-site. Even though the operators are 20 or 30 miles away, it's like they are actually sitting in the building.

Keeping Operators Updated

The operators use Amtelco's operator chat feature to keep others updated. They could use this to inform the other operators to contact a doctor on his cell phone, not his pager, for example. The chat feature allows them to communicate as if they are in the same room. Operators also communicate via e-mail and phone calls.

The Benefits of Working from Home

One obvious benefit from the beginning was the reduced operator sick days. "Between sick calls and having to travel in the bad weather, we don't get as many as we used to. And if we get a sick call from somebody, it's easier to find someone to fill in."

There are other benefits that working from home offers to operators. "They don't have to pay for gas, they don't have the wear-and-tear on their vehicles, and they don't have the clothing expense. When they start their day, they log into our timecard and don't have the commuting time. Because of the economy, there were many benefits we couldn't give them, but I think some of the other benefits compensated," stated the hospital manager.

Having the operators work from home has also opened up a sizeable potential employee pool, including those unable to travel to the central location. The manager commented, "I had many applicants for a recent job that was posted. They finally closed it after the second day. I think

everyone thought, with the theory of working from home, that it would be easy to do. But even though some think it's a luxury, you have to have the right person. And they do have to be available to come to the site if they lose their Internet access."

Remote Monitoring

"The minute I walk in the building, I turn my agent screen on, and I chat with the operators to make sure they're okay," said the manager. "I'm not always here to make sure they're working, so I run reports to ensure they're not taking extra breaks or extra lunches or that there aren't long gaps between calls."

Calls and call recordings can be monitored daily to assess the operator's ability to handle the calls correctly. "The number of caller complaints have dropped drastically since switching to Amtelco's call center software."

Simplified Training and Remote Discipline

When new operators are hired, they train on-site for about a month. "They work with a seasoned operator, listen for a day or two, and then usually by the third day, the new person takes calls. They'll start with one specific site and then move on as they progress with their learning. They work with the seasoned operator to ensure it's going like it should," according to the manager. "I had someone that started right before the operators went home, and she caught on right away. That was probably the fastest training I've ever done."

When there is a problem, handling it remotely can be challenging. "Sometimes, when I send an operator an e-mail, they mistakenly think I'm mad at them. So, another piece I'm learning is the best way to communicate. I also think it depends on the individual. Issues with some operators are best handled by a phone call—some by e-mail."

Keeping the Staff Connected

One thing many operators miss about not being in the office daily is the social aspect. To address this and to help keep the staff connected, staff meetings are scheduled every three weeks. "To stay connected, we either meet at the facility or we try to go outside the facility," the manager said. The operators also plan additional staff outings outside of work and meet with each other for lunch on their days off.

Backup Plan

If Internet or phone service goes out or operators cannot use stations remotely for any reason, the operators are required to report to the main hospital facility, where backup stations are available.



There have been several interesting circumstances. The manager commented, "I have people located in two different counties. The last time we lost our Internet service, we discovered that everyone in one county lost their Internet, but the people in the other were okay. I had the backup, so I was able to call the operators in the available county and say, 'Hop on because the people in the other county can't get on.'"

As this Midwestern hospital continues to grow, more staff members are working from home to save space at their facility.

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with questions.



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