



Case Study

Birchwood gets beneficial boost with mobility and VoIP solutions



About Birchwood Snow and Landscape Contractors

Birchwood Snow and Landscape Contractors (Birchwood) provides all types of property management services for commercial and industrial companies throughout Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The company's retail stores sell landscaping and snow removal equipment and supplies to thousands of landscapers.

Situation

Birchwood needed an efficient way to update landscapers about its flexible retail store hours. The company wanted to improve its communications network to handle its growing business, including increasing store transactions. Buried in paperwork, Birchwood needed to automate its invoicing and payroll processes and eliminate revenue-impacting errors.

Solution

Using the AT&T Messaging ToolkitSM, Birchwood updates landscapers about store hours, equipment sales and new products. Approximately 80 percent of customers have signed up for the new messaging service and appreciate getting the latest news. AT&T IP Flexible Reach[®] (SIP Trunking) and AT&T Managed Internet Service (MIS) give Birchwood the reliable, adaptable bandwidth needed for its stores' increasing point-of-sale transactions. The AT&T VoIP Network routes customer calls to mobile workers' cell phones for immediate service. AT&T Business Messaging helps Birchwood alert supervisors and workers when snow is imminent. Birchwood uses AT&T Fleet Center to track and help protect its equipment in the field, leading to reduced insurance costs. Using the solution's location tracking reports, the company is able to validate job completion and speed up invoice and payroll processing.

Open for Business

Birchwood Snow and Landscape Contractors is a full-service property management company with some of the largest and well-known companies as its customers. A major force in its region, Birchwood's 400 employees serve commercial and industrial businesses in a six-state region.

"My Dad started Birchwood back in 1975 as a landscape company," said Joe Kassander, Vice President. "Over the years, the company has grown and evolved to provide pretty much all services that help our customers maintain their buildings and properties."

In 2009, Birchwood even opened its doors to other landscapers. Called Birchwood Landscaping Equipment, this retail division sells landscaping equipment and supplies to thousands of mid-sized and small landscaping businesses. "During the economic downturn, the market was flooded with a lot of new landscapers," explained Kassander. "To stay competitive and profitable, we decided to work with these new entrants by becoming a retailer. It turned out to be a great business decision."

Birchwood Snow and Landscape Contractors Facts

Business Needs

Simplify and improve business processes and communications

Networking Solution

AT&T Mobility Solutions for dispatching mobile workers, managing equipment in the field, and text messaging helpful information to customers; AT&T Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VoIP) Network Solutions for reliable, increased bandwidth

Business Value

Improved customer relations, reduced costs, recovered revenue, increased cash flow and happier employees

Industry Focus

Property management services

Size

400 employees

To learn more about AT&T Voice Services, visit www.att.com/voip-services or [have us contact you.](#)

Share this with your peers



With two stores in place and a third one on the way, Birchwood Landscaping Equipment now sells to more than 3,000 landscapers, especially during hard winter months. "In this part of the country, winters are extreme and unpredictable," said Kassander. "We could get six inches of snow one day, and it might be 60 degrees the next day."

During the snowy season, keeping its retail stores open for business around the clock is not unusual for Birchwood. "It's important that we have AT&T to keep our customers informed and respond to their calls," he added.

Responsiveness is Everything

Before going with AT&T, Birchwood used a wide range of communications vendors to support the business, but found them to be unresponsive. "In this business where responsiveness is everything, we needed to work with a company that was just as responsive to us as we were to our customers," said Kassander. "We also needed a more flexible, reliable network for our growing retail business."

Dan McCarthy, Director of Marketing, concurred. "Throughout the winter, our stores might be open long hours for landscapers needing supplies. Yet with our employees working so many hours already, we may decide to close the stores for just a few hours to give them a break – say from 5:00 p.m. to midnight. I needed a way to alert customers about our changing store hours. We gave out our cell phone numbers and asked them to check in first, but this wasn't a good solution. If a landscaper drove to a store and it was closed, we would surely lose that customer."

"In the past, it was hard to get the word out; now it's very quick and easy with AT&T Messaging Toolkit."

– Joe Kassander, Vice President,
Birchwood Snow and Landscape Contractors

Kassander also wanted to streamline Birchwood's processes. "In any given snowstorm, I would get a stack of paperwork from our drivers about a foot high that we would sort through for billing customers," explained Kassander. "Our drivers work a lot of hours for long periods of time and doing paperwork is not necessarily a priority. Yet, for me and our customers, paperwork has to be a priority for accurate invoices."

Kassander called on AT&T for a recommendation. "The AT&T team not only helped us with our network, they also included what we needed to track our assets and better communicate with our landscapers," said Kassander. "They even researched and suggested a new phone system, something that we really needed. Now we get one bill and deal with one responsive company – AT&T."

Keeping Customers Informed

When landscapers visit Birchwood's stores, they now get an opportunity to sign up for the company's new messaging service. Made possible by the AT&T Messaging Toolkit, the service provides Birchwood customers with up-to-date text messages about store hours.

During Birchwood's annual Open House, more than 2,000 of the 3,000 attendees opted to sign up for the service. Since then, more have joined as McCarthy promotes the value of being on the AT&T text-messaging list.

"We have offered the messaging service to customers and about 80 percent of them have opted in," said McCarthy. "They really appreciate the alerts about store hours. It also helps us secure our relationships with them."

"We were losing about \$100,000 each year in missed billing – revenue that we have recovered, thanks to the AT&T Fleet Center mobile application."

– Joe Kassander, Vice President,
Birchwood Snow and Landscape Contractors

McCarthy has found other helpful ways to use the AT&T Messaging Toolkit. He alerts landscapers when a big sale is pending or a new product is available. "When I have a piece of equipment that I know is a 'hot item,' I send a photo and description to groups of customers that I know will be interested," said McCarthy. "We can more quickly sell it, and we help our customers who might be searching for much-needed equipment. With the AT&T Messaging Toolkit, I can create different groups and target my messaging – with text, voice and even video."

Likewise when Birchwood stores introduce a new product, McCarthy easily promotes its availability. "Last month alone, we added two new vendors and their products," explained McCarthy. "In the past, it was hard to get the word out; now it's very quick and easy with AT&T Messaging Toolkit."

McCarthy once mailed at least 2,000 mailers each month to communicate the same information now instantaneously communicated with text messages. As a result, he estimated a \$10,000 annual savings in postage expense alone. "And our text messages are more effective than direct mail since we know they are delivered and read by customers," added McCarthy. "It has saved me time to accomplish things I couldn't seem to find the time to do before."

Answering Customer Calls

Birchwood is equally proactive when it comes to keeping its commercial customers informed about snow removal and its workers productive. When snow flurries fly, AT&T Business Messaging is used to text supervisors who then coordinate with their crews.

"Before, we would text or call each individual supervisor," said Kassander. "If he didn't answer, we left a voice-mail message to call back, which always took some time." Birchwood now uses Business Messaging to communicate pertinent information to all supervisors and dispatch workers to customer sites, saving significant time.

"Even though we are very proactive when it comes to snow removal, some of our customers still like to call us to just check in," continued Kassander. "We used to hand out our supervisors' cell phone numbers to answer those calls. Or if customers called our main number, they might get voice mail. I never felt this was a very professional way to handle these valuable customers."

To learn more about AT&T Voice Services, visit www.att.com/voip-services or [have us contact you.](#)

Share this with
your peers



With [AT&T IP Flexible Reach](#), each Birchwood customer's call is directly routed to the worker's cell phone. Customers no longer need to remember multiple cell phone numbers, and rarely need to leave voice-mail messages.

"Employees can answer customer calls from their homes versus being in the office at all hours," explained Kassander. "It's like having a mobile call center without the investment of staffing a facility. It controls our labor and utility costs and keeps our employees happy as well."

Handling Point-of-Sale Transactions

AT&T IP Flexible Reach and AT&T MIS also provide Birchwood with the reliable network backbone for its growing and busy business. The combination delivers integrated, IP voice and data service to two Birchwood sites: its main location with stores as well as a warehouse.

"With the addition of our retail stores and their increasing point-of-sale transactions, not having an accessible and reliable network had become an issue," said Kassander. "With AT&T VoIP services, we now have efficient and dynamic bandwidth for our data and voice needs."

For Birchwood's mobile workers, the AT&T wireless network provides reliable connections throughout the region. "Our previous wireless network dropped calls all the time," said Kassander. "In our business, poor connections add up to poor customer relations. It was also a matter of safety for our workers. In the middle of a snowstorm, my guys in the field needed the assurance of knowing they could make a call and get through."

The [AT&T Smart Business Suite](#) also provides Birchwood with one AT&T contract for one price and one bill. It bundles [AT&T VoIP](#) and wireless services along with around-the-clock AT&T technical support. "I knew AT&T would have the right technology for our needs, yet I was very pleased that they also had the right business arrangement for our company. They helped us transition from multiple vendors and services to a better, simplified solution," said Kassander.

Keeping Track of Vehicles and Assets

Birchwood workers use all types of equipment – loaders, tractors and trucks with plows – to help them move snow or earth. Unlike cars and trucks, equipment like skid loaders and wheel loaders do not have titles – paperwork is rarely exchanged when bought and sold.

"It's relatively easy for someone to pull up and just take a piece of equipment," explained Kassander.

Landscaping equipment can be pricey to replace; a skid loader could cost as much as \$50,000 and a wheel loader could be \$150,000. Insurance rates can also run high. "With AT&T Fleet Center, we can now monitor the whereabouts of our 144 pieces of equipment," said Kassander. "As a result, we haven't had a single theft and our insurance costs have dropped by about 20 percent."

Kassander also uses the AT&T Fleet Center [mobile application](#) to help speed the company's invoicing process. A small GPS tracking device is attached to each piece of equipment, allowing the company to easily monitor jobs on the portal. "With the reports, I have a historical record of where each piece of equipment was located, when it arrived and when it departed," said Kassander. "I no longer need to go through the pile of paperwork to invoice our customers or complete my payroll."

Birchwood's billing cycle has been cut in half, improving cash flow. "Before AT&T Fleet Center, we invoiced our customers every 30 days. Now we bill every 15 days – a huge boost to our cash flow," said Kassander.

It has also eliminated mistakes that translate into lost company revenue. "We were losing about \$100,000 each year in missed billing – revenue that we have recovered, thanks to the AT&T Fleet Center mobile application."

Now Kassander resolves any customer billing disputes and inquiries by pulling up reports and showing the customer the exact time the driver arrived, when the piece of equipment was powered up, and more. "It helps us keep customer relationships strong," said Kassander.

Both Kassander and McCarthy have found that improvements in Birchwood's business operations have made all the communications changes "worth it."

"We are already experiencing some major benefits from our AT&T mobility solutions," said Kassander. "We wanted to take the complexity out of our business by taking a one-stop-shop approach to our communications infrastructure and network. AT&T is helping us stay at the top of our game."

Share this with
your peers



For more information contact an AT&T Representative or visit www.att.com/fleet-management.

To learn more about [AT&T Voice Services](#),
visit www.att.com/voip-services or [have us contact you](#).



Scan this code
to learn more.

Important Information

Coverage not available in all areas. Availability, security, speed, timeliness and uninterrupted use of service are not guaranteed. Compatible device required. Additional hardware, software, services and/or network connection may be required depending on selected solution. Potential benefits may vary by customer and with selected solution. Offers subject to change. Additional restrictions apply. For additional information contact your AT&T account representative.

06/18/14 AB-2572-01

© 2014 AT&T Intellectual Property. All rights reserved. AT&T, AT&T logo and all other AT&T marks contained herein are trademarks of AT&T Intellectual Property and/or AT&T affiliated companies. All other trademarks are the property of their owners. Actual results and your experience may vary from those described in this case study. Information and offers subject to change. Please contact your sales representative for additional information.

