Customer Stories:

DownHome Pharmacy

About DownHome Pharmacy

DownHome Pharmacy in Monticello, Mississippi, offers the latest in advanced healthcare services with the personal attention and charm of a bygone era. In addition to filling prescriptions and providing vaccinations, immunizations, Medicare consultations, text notifications and automatic refills, the pharmacy also features a gift shop, greeting card gallery, and old-fashioned soda fountain.

The situation

When one of the two drugstores closed in Lawrence County, Mississippi, pharmacist Jamie E. Crane was determined to open a new pharmacy to serve the healthcare needs of the community. In addition to the challenges faced by all new business owners, Crane had to contend with delays and restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Before he could begin serving patients, Crane needed to establish voice and data networks that would enable the pharmacy to connect patients and healthcare professionals.
Solution

DownHome Pharmacy chose AT&T Dedicated Internet Service to provide ultra-reliable connectivity to meet its critical business needs. The pharmacy also uses AT&T IP Flexible Reach Service and an AT&T wireless backup solution to help keep the pharmacy and its patients connected.

Community pharmacies improve access to care

Small-town pharmacies are vital to the communities they serve. In addition to filling prescriptions, pharmacists offer many other valuable medical services to people who may not have easy access to physicians.

Most pharmacies now offer flu shots and other vaccines, which improves access to care and allows a much higher rate of vaccination than when patients had to see a physician to receive the immunizations. Many pharmacists also offer disease-state management for conditions like hypertension and diabetes.

The care that community pharmacies provide is personal, since the pharmacist often knows the patient and the extended family. This can provide valuable insight when it comes to recognizing early-stage medical problems.

Community pharmacies often serve rural populations, which tend to have higher rates of chronic disease and worse mental health than people in other areas—but less access to services. People in rural areas are also less likely to be tested for chronic diseases, which leads to higher hospitalization rates.

When one of only two pharmacies closed in Lawrence County, Mississippi, pharmacist Jamie Crane saw a need to open a new pharmacy. “My mom was born and raised here, along with her 10 brothers and sisters,” he said. “I’ve always wanted to work around here, and after working elsewhere for 27 years, I finally made it back.”

Friendly, personalized service

Crane envisioned a pharmacy that combined cutting-edge health services with the amenities that seem to have disappeared in many chain drugstores.

He named his new shop DownHome Pharmacy to let people know that they could expect friendly, personalized service. “We consider ourselves easy to deal with, level-headed, good-old country folk,” he explained.
The community was eager for its new pharmacy to open, dropping by often while Crane and his staff were just setting up shop. “People were already poking their heads in and giving us some really good feedback.”

Crane hired many employees of the pharmacy that closed. “One of our goals was trying to get jobs back,” he said. “And people want to see the faces they’re used to seeing. We couldn’t wait to begin taking care of the community again.”

**Privacy and a down-home feeling**

The pharmacy offers several programs that are becoming popular with patients, including services that help people simplify their medications and dispose of old medicines. Diabetics and other patients who require frequent injections can bring their used needles to DownHome, which will safely dispose of them at no cost to patients. A drive-through window lets patients pick up their prescriptions easily. The pharmacy also offers a local delivery service.

DownHome has made it easy for nursing homes and assisted-living facilities to manage their residents’ prescription needs through the pharmacy’s website. With one login, facility staff members can view prescription lists for all their residents, check the status of an order, and request refills.

Crane equipped a private area in the new pharmacy with a comfortable, old, gossiping chair. It has a little table attached to one side. The cozy setup enables patients to meet with a pharmacy staff for a consultation, have a blood pressure reading, a flu shot, or other immunization. “It just gives patients privacy and more of a personal, down-home feel,” he said.

The community has been very welcoming to the new business. “As far as prescription volume, we’re probably averaging 300 prescriptions a day,” Crane said.

**Automation protects patients, increases efficiency**

Like most enterprises, pharmacies depend on technology to manage many aspects of their business.

In the 1960s, pharmacies were on the leading edge of healthcare automation. In the 80s, they became early adopters of computers. Using computers for accounting and inventory control helped pharmacies increase efficiency and cut costs.

Pharmacy software keeps a record of each drug a patient takes, the physician who prescribed it, and the quantity dispensed. It also screens for potential drug interactions and determines the cost to patient and
amount billed to insurance. Insurance billing must occur in near-real time, so the amount for which the patient is responsible can be collected when the patient picks up the prescription.

“Our software monitors everything about the prescription and the person we’re filling it for,” Crane said. DownHome Pharmacy maintains these and other records in an on-premises server that’s backed up in the cloud. “All that is internet-driven,” Crane added. “Literally everything we do, from our files to voice-over IP phones to the security system is involved with our internet, and very valuable to us. If the internet goes down here, we’re just dead in the water. We can’t function.”

He tested a bundled product from a regional communications provider that offered internet and phone service. “I tried to make a couple of phone calls, but it was so difficult because there was a lag,” he said.

To complicate matters, as Crane was in the process of launching DownHome Pharmacy the coronavirus and COVID-19 emerged in the U.S. “We were trying to get things up and we had COVID-19 to contend with,” he said. “Depending on how long the virus lasts, we may become a testing site for COVID right here in our community.” Crane needed to get the pharmacy up and running as quickly as possible.

This required highly reliable phone and internet service. “Without it, we couldn’t do anything,” he said. “It would shut us down.”

Highly reliable, fast, and accurate

At the recommendation of a colleague, Crane met with an AT&T Business representative and decided on AT&T Dedicated Voice and Internet—with highly reliable, high-performing services that keep DownHome Pharmacy connected and running efficiently. The services are built on AT&T Fiber technology, which powers ultra-fast upload and download speeds and supplies the bandwidth to support the new pharmacy’s demands. DownHome Pharmacy also invested in an internet backup system from AT&T Business. The wireless solution automatically restores internet connectivity in case the pharmacy ever loses power.

Bandwidth to support a growing business

Crane needed a highly reliable and highly secure way to connect his computers, server, and security system to the internet. He contacted friends at several pharmacies to learn about their experiences. All recommended that he invest in a network that offered plenty of bandwidth.
Crane is pleased with the internet and phone services he chose for his new business. “Our internet is incredibly fast, which we need because of the software we use to run our business,” he said. “Everything pivots off our AT&T Business Services.”

The pharmacy has 4 phone lines, all reachable by the same phone number. “The system also detects faxes, which we can receive as an email,” he said. “That’s helping us get people’s prescriptions and fill them quickly. It’s highly reliable, fast, and accurate. None of that would be possible without AT&T Business,” Crane said.

“A commitment to the old and the new

The speed of the installation process was a big benefit for the new pharmacy, especially as it came during a time when many businesses were closed due to COVID-19. “Our contractor couldn’t believe how fast we were up and running,” Crane said. “I understand that it can take up to 90 days to get fiber installed. But our AT&T Business account rep realized that we were in a time crunch. The next thing you know it was installed. The contractor said he’d never seen anything like it.”

Crane said he plans to share with colleagues what he’s learned while opening DownHome Pharmacy. “We definitely will recommend AT&T to other folks and explain how AT&T Business simplified things and speeded up the process,” he said. “I would have been so disappointed if we had gone with the other provider. Our phone calls have no lag and there are no other problems. It’s incredible and it means a lot to me.”

Crane concluded: “Our number-one goal is taking care of our people.” DownHome Pharmacy’s commitment to good old-fashioned personal service and its decision to support its patients with the best new technology have set up the pharmacy—and the community—for a healthy future.

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Jamie E. Crane
R.Ph., Pharmacist, DownHome Pharmacy