

First Call Ambulance of Nashville uses AT&T IoT to keep the focus on patient care

- **Business needs** - First Call wanted to update its ambulance technology to enhance the care paramedics and EMTs provide for each patient. They also wanted to make it easier for dispatchers to see the location of each emergency vehicle.
- **Networking solution** - AT&T helped First Call streamline and upgrade the technology it uses to deliver incomparable care for the communities it serves.
- **Business value** - The solutions enhance ambulance crews' ability to care for patients and simplify communication with dispatchers, hospitals, and other care providers.
- **Industry focus** - Medical transport
- **Size** - 350 employees working from 8 locations

About First Call Ambulance

First Call Ambulance was launched in Nashville in early 2004 with just 2 ambulances and a handful of paramedics and EMTs. The passion of its staff to provide exceptional patient care led to rapid growth. First Call has become one of the largest medical transport services in Tennessee. Its team now includes more than 350 employees and well over 60 ambulances, vans, and support vehicles. Each year, First Call responds to more than 50,000 requests for medical transport services. While non-emergency ambulance transport represents the lion's share of First Call's business, the company also provides emergency ambulance transportation in one Tennessee county. It expects to expand this business line into other areas.

The situation

Federal and state agencies mandate equipment and safety standards for ambulance companies. Always a step ahead, First Call Ambulance went well beyond government requirements, investing in equipment and technology to support the best possible patient care. This included ruggedized laptop computers, cell phones, radio systems, and wireless hot spots. First Call recently set out to modernize and simplify the equipment in its ambulances and improve operations by making it easier for dispatchers to see the location of each vehicle.

Solution

AT&T worked with First Call Ambulance to streamline its technology. They replaced multiple devices with tablet computers and added an array of Internet of Things (IoT) solutions. AT&T Enhanced Push-to-Talk (EPTT) gives ambulance crews instant voice communications and highly secure messaging, location features, and features based on industry standards for Mission Critical Push-to-Talk (MCPTT)—such as emergency calling. Fleet Complete delivers GPS tracking and management solutions that improve dispatch and support safety. The account team also recommended IBM MaaS360® from AT&T, a mobile device management platform, and GPS Lockbox™, an industrial strength tablet case. The case has a dashboard mount that charges tablet computers automatically and enables First Call to comply with safety regulations for hands-free communications.

Partnering to serve each community's needs

First Call Ambulance in Nashville was founded to respond to the need for private companies to provide medically supervised but non-emergency patient transport. The company typically transports patients who are medically stable but require specialized equipment and trained medical professionals.

"Having first responders transport non-emergency patients can create difficulties," said CEO Scott Yates. "Especially in small communities, first responders who transport a non-emergency patient may leave their community without available ambulances if an emergency occurs. Private companies like First Call fill the gap by transporting patients in non-emergency situations."

First Call has earned a reputation for excellence by looking out for the needs of the communities it serves. "Our philosophy is not just to transport patients from point A to point B, but to partner with first responders to serve the greater needs of the community," he said.

Yates greets every new employee by reinforcing this attitude. "I always say, 'Welcome to First Call. We have very strong relationships in every community we serve. When you get into the ambulance, imagine it's your grandmother in the back and you're trying to give her the very best care.'"

Going beyond what's required

As part of its commitment to patients, First Call strives to exceed federal and state mandates on equipment, safety, and technology. "We like to go beyond the requirements so that we can provide the absolute best care," Yates said.

He notes that technology has changed a great deal since the company was founded. "If you go back 15 years, most ambulance communication is by citizen-band radio. That's still a requirement for emergency radio communication in ambulances, but most crews use cell phones and tablets. This generation of EMTs and paramedics is comfortable with them, so you try to use technology that works for them to make it efficient."

For many years, First Call used ruggedized laptops in its ambulances so staff could capture patient care reports. First Call also equipped employees with flip phones with push-to-talk to facilitate communication with dispatchers. To provide connectivity for the devices, it created a mobile Wi-Fi® network inside each vehicle.

Uptime, however, was an ongoing challenge. And the proliferation of devices in each ambulance was becoming unmanageable. “From a safety standpoint,” Yates said, “the number of devices ended up being a distraction for the EMT or paramedic behind the wheel and for those providing patient care.”

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In addition, Yates was concerned that employees would view the age of some of its technology as a lack of commitment by First Call to support its workers. “We were looking for solutions that could help us give our employees confidence,” Yates said. “They need to know that we’re arming them with the tools to do excellent work.” First Call turned to AT&T for help in simplifying and modernizing its communications technology and processes.

Reducing distractions in the ambulance

AT&T helped First Call streamline its communications with a suite of IoT solutions, including a Wi-Fi-enabled tablet that eliminates 3 separate devices. “We replaced the flip phones, the laptops, and the Wi-Fi hotspots in our trucks,” Yates said. “The ability to go to a Wi-Fi-enabled

tablet to both communicate with push-to-talk and capture all of our patient information solved our problem.”

The tablet is mounted in the front of each cab in a GPS Lockbox™. GPS Lockbox is a constant-charging device, enabling hands-free communications with dispatch and providing turn-by-turn directions. This helps crews to maintain focus and avoid distractions en route.

During transport, one crew member brings the tablet to the back of the ambulance to document the care. “While we’re doing that, we can still communicate through the tablet,” Yates said. AT&T Enhanced Push-to-Talk (EPTT) provides virtually instant voice communications, highly secure messaging, and location features over cellular and Wi-Fi networks.

The EPTT Web Dispatch Solution (WDS) is a valuable tool for dispatchers. “AT&T Enhanced Push-to-Talk WDS supports good, clear communication between our ambulance crews and dispatch,” he said.

Dispatchers also like the control they get with the AT&T web-based console. The console displays the location of each ambulance and enables dispatch to communicate with any ambulance with just a click. “The web-based console replaced our inefficient system,” Yates said. “We would look at a screen on the wall with the GPS location of the ambulances and use a hand-held push-to-talk phone, and then key in a number,” Yates said.

Dispatchers like having the ability to talk with multiple crews simultaneously. “Many times we would have the need for two ambulances to respond to a situation,” Yates said. “Now we can communicate with both of them at the same time and have both able to communicate with us.”

Keeping the focus on patient care

AT&T technology makes it easy for crew members to submit patient-care reports electronically. Once the patient transport is finished, the crew member uses the tablet to upload the report electronically. Once uploaded, they replace the tablet in the GPS Lockbox on the dashboard so it's ready for the next call.

Crews like not having a separate charger and mounting device in the cab. "The GPS Lockbox helps us make sure that the tablets stay charged for the duration of a shift and helps us be as safe as possible for communicating back with dispatch," Yates said. "And it's rugged enough to take a fall or any kind of abuse that might occur." The solution also provides a fixed location inside the truck for mounting an external speaker, so it's easy to use, even while driving.

First Call also uses IBM MaaS360® from AT&T, a mobile device management solution. "It keeps our tablets highly secure," he said. "Our IT director was able to use

the software to configure and deploy all the tablets. It has simplified what the EMT and paramedics see on the devices to keep them focused on the right thing—patient care."

To track and monitor the health of its ambulances, First Call uses Fleet Complete. "We are able to see what condition the vehicle was operating in just prior to an event," Yates said. "Whether it is some type of malfunction or maybe an accident or near accident, you can get a sense of heavy braking or turning, or even see what type of code had been registered due to an error message in the drive train."

Fulfilling a commitment

Yates appreciates the assistance his company received from AT&T. He feels it's put them on the cutting edge of technology—which benefits the communities First Call serves. "The fruits of the solutions from AT&T are an increased confidence that our staff can do their jobs better," he said. "That's probably the most important value that AT&T has added to our organization. Our team has been fantastic." He added that he has not only recommended the solution, First Call has demonstrated its AT&T technology to help other organizations improve their effectiveness.

First Call's investment in technology enhances how they serve their communities. "We accept the call from hospitals and nursing homes, show up when they expect us to show up, and provide great patient care," Yates said. "That's what we do. We want to do that wherever we are, and if we're going to be in a community, we want to do that very well."

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