

Customer Stories:

Per Mar Security Services

Per Mar Security helps customers thrive—even in unforeseen circumstances—thanks to business continuity investments in

AT&T cybersecurity and telephony solutions

- **Business needs** - Per Mar Security sought to upgrade its voice and data networks and buttress cybersecurity to support ongoing business continuity.
- **Networking solution** - A suite of telephony and cybersecurity solutions from AT&T Business enables Per Mar staff and customers to continue their important work, even in the face of a global pandemic.
- **Business value** - Continuous ability to help connect and protect staff, customers and property, even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Industry focus** - Home and business security solutions provider
- **Size** - \$150 million in annual revenues

About Per Mar Security Services

Per Mar Security, one of the largest family-owned full-service security company in the Midwest, provides security solutions for homes and businesses. Its services include customized security systems, security officers, investigations, background checks, alarm monitoring and more. The company operates 25 branch locations in 28 states, providing a range of electronic security solutions and guards to protect homes and businesses from theft and disasters.

The situation

As a security company, Per Mar was always proactive in seeking out the best ways to protect its staff and systems and those of its clients. Years before the COVID-19 outbreak, the company created a plan that would ensure business continuity in the event of a disaster, including a pandemic. As it continually updated its disaster-response plan, Per Mar needed reliable voice and data network solutions that would enable its 3,000 employees to continue to do their jobs.



Solution

Per Mar selected AT&T IP Flexible Reach, a SIP Trunking service with enhanced features that allows the company to forward employees' inbound work calls to virtually any telephone number. It also uses a suite of AT&T cybersecurity solutions to protect its networks and data.

Foresight and agility

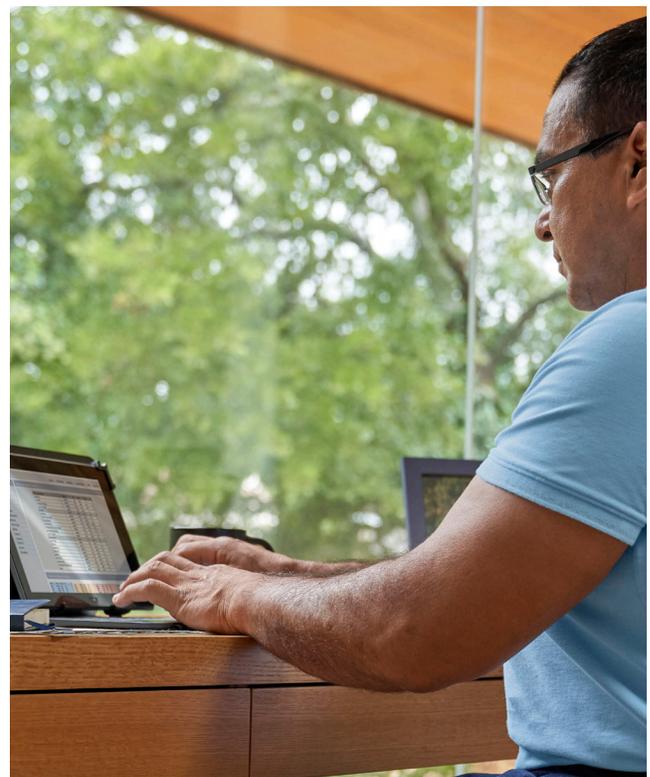
Per Mar Security Services was originally founded as a security and investigative business in 1953 by John and Eleanor Duffy in Davenport, Iowa. The couple initially ran the business out of the family home on Iowa Street.

In the ensuing seven decades Per Mar has expanded into 28 states, where its 3,000 employees serve more than 75,000 customers. And while the company now has more than two dozen branch and satellite locations, things have come full circle: as part of the company's efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic,

it has arranged for many employees to work from home, just as the Duffys did in Per Mar's earliest days.

Staff can comply with shelter-in-place regulations and still get the job done thanks to the stunning foresight of Per Mar officials, who years ago created a business continuity plan that addressed unforeseen circumstances like the pandemic. CIO Dan Turner attributes their presence of mind to, "Midwest common sense and having an owner that listens." Per Mar was able to move swiftly to arrange for hundreds of staff to work from home.

Their business continuity plan has been updated continuously to protect customers and ensure the business would survive. "Our pandemic plan honestly didn't take into account the shuttering of the entire United States by any stretch," Turner said. "But at least we had a good starting point."



Prudent planning enables new ways to work

Even though the security company is not bound by the governmental shelter in place order, officials wanted to do their part to help prevent the spread of the virus. “We got our designation as an essential business, but our owner was adamant about keeping social distancing in place and getting as many people out of our branch offices as possible,” Turner said.

While its guards still report for duty at the hospitals, plants, schools, and other places they’re hired to protect, the company decided to have its 800 knowledge workers do their jobs from home. The company’s investment in a suite of AT&T Business solutions ensured that Per Mar employees could receive phone calls and access the files and applications they needed to work from home.

Moving a large volume of calls from the office network to workers’ homes could potentially overwhelm the company’s trunk lines if they used a traditional method of forwarding the calls in and out of their phone system. Thanks to the AT&T IP Flexible Reach Enhanced Features Portal, Per Mar’s IT staff was able to easily transfer the calls at a network level in near-real time and without having to place any orders with AT&T Business. This avoided any possible concern with phone system congestion or failure.

“We closed all of our branch offices down, so there’s nobody to answer phone calls anymore,” Turner said. “AT&T IP Flexible Reach let us redirect the main line of each business office back to our customer care teams to be answered. And we reprinted everybody’s direct phone lines to their cell phones.”

Telephony is important to the security company because alarm signals are sent through the telephone lines. The solution has proved to be reliable and cost-effective for Per Mar.



Support for mission-critical services

Reliability is paramount, because Per Mar processes more than 2 million signals a month at its central station. “All those millions of signals a month mean voice calls going in and going out, and that all rides on the AT&T IP Flexible Reach service that we have with AT&T Business,” Turner said. “Our design with AT&T IP Flexible Reach is virtually bulletproof.”

The company uses redundant AT&T Business circuits at its disaster recovery site. “We tested our entire disaster recovery plan because of the pandemic, just to be sure,” he said. “These pieces are mission-critical in making sure we can satisfy the needs of our 75,000 customers.”

Much of what Per Mar offers its customers is vital, yet difficult to quantify. “We provide security and

peace of mind,” Turner said. “We save lives every day, so our ability to contact the authorities to get the ambulance and fire trucks where they need to be to save peoples’ lives is of utmost importance. So we’ve designed a totally redundant solution, with AT&T Business at the heart of it.” Part of the redundancy involves 4G connectivity from AT&T, which Per Mar uses to back up its software-defined networks.

It also uses AT&T SIM cards to provide connectivity for four dispatchers who had no internet services at home. “Now they can continue to earn a paycheck and provide services to our customers,” he said.

Resources beyond the basics

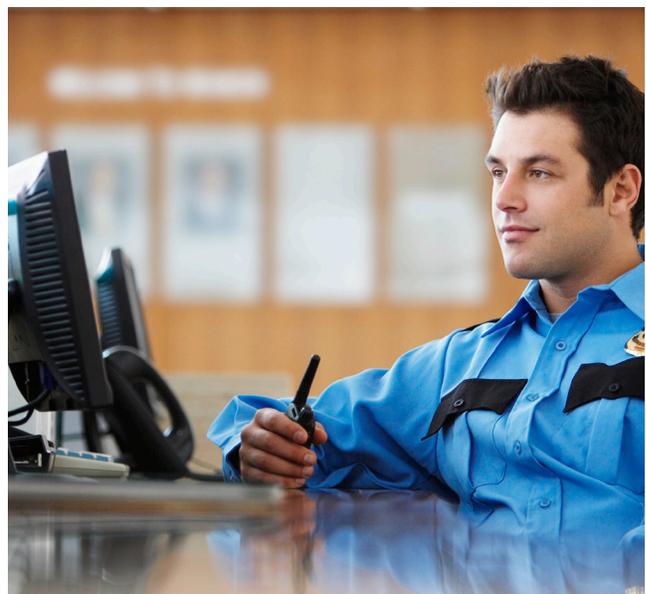
Per Mar also uses Secure Email Gateway Service from AT&T Business to protect against spam, malware, ransomware, phishing scams, and other inbound threats. The solution screens email and filters out known and suspected threats before they reach the company’s network.

This has become especially important since staff have begun working at home. “I’m spending a lot of time making sure we’re staying secure, now that we just moved 800 people out of our physical buildings to their kitchen tables,” Turner said. To keep cybersecurity top of mind, he is sending out an email three times a week to remind people not to click on links from senders they don’t know.

Despite the warnings, an employee attempted to override a security notice when the Secure Email Gateway blocked a link he was trying to open. “The guy forwarded the email to his personal email account on his home computer,” Turner said.

“And it was a bad site, and he crypto-locked his home computer and then called us to fix it.”

Turner used the story during a team conference call recently to illustrate the ongoing dangers the company faces. “Our tools are doing their job. They blocked the URL, but this guy went out around them,” he said.



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Chief Information Officer, Per Mar Security

Value in building relationships

Turner says it's impossible to overstate the advantages of Per Mar's association with AT&T Business. "I've met some really smart people through my relationship with AT&T Business, and I think that's been the most beneficial," he said. "We can get down to the bits and bytes and speeds on the WAN or voice or the other services that AT&T Business provides, and we consume quite a bit of that. But it's all the rest that comes with it."

Turner continued: "That's where I find the value-add with AT&T Business that I just don't get with all the other vendors. Every other vendor just wants to sell me a widget and just come knocking on the door again when they're ready to sell me another widget."

Per Mar's AT&T Business account manager takes the time to really understand their business, its ownership, and the dynamics that come with being a privately held company. "He has really partnered up with us to deliver some world-class solutions, that, in return, we can deliver to our customers and continue to operate in a 24 by 7, 365-day environment, with no downtime."

"We see value in building relationships and want to get the most value from our suppliers," Turner said. "We rely heavily on providers like AT&T Business to help us stay aware of the best solutions."

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