AT&T Business



Gullo's is serving up hospitality with fiber connectivity

Business needs

High-speed internet plus integrated phone and messaging to support hospitality goals

Networking solution

AT&T Fiber connectivity and AT&T Office@Hand simplify networking and communication across business devices

Business value

Fast, reliable connectivity; next-level customer service

Industry focus

Hospitality

Size

Single location

About Gullo's Fresh Produce and Bake Shop

Family owned and operated, Gullo's Fresh Produce and Bake Shop is a restaurant and mercantile in Shreveport, Louisiana, featuring mouthwatering burgers, daily specials, and savory back porch barbecue. Customers can purchase farm-to-table produce, baked goods, jellies, and pickles from the mercantile or their e-commerce store.

The situation

After a fire gutted the property, third-generation family owner Craig Hamilton set out to rebuild and modernize his business. To better serve customers, he needed to upgrade his existing copper Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) internet to a fast, reliable, and flexible connection. Gullo's also needed a voice and messaging solution that would enable them to return missed calls during busy periods.

Solution

Gullo's chose AT&T Fiber to power point-of-sale (POS) systems, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone, and wireless printers and tablets. They added AT&T Office@Hand, an integrated phone and messaging platform that makes it easy to stay in touch by keeping customer information in one place.

Savoring every opportunity

Gullo's Fresh Produce and Bake Shop General Manager Craig Hamilton knows how to fill the hearts and appetites of his customers. And why wouldn't he? He's been doing it all his life.

Family-owned and operated for over 50 years, Gullo's was started by Hamilton's grandparents in 1973. What began as a roadside farm stand selling home-grown produce, Gullo's has since become a Shreveport favorite serving locals and those in the larger Ark-La-Tex region.

"I don't want to say they were pioneers, but they really started a movement of farm-to-table fresh," Hamilton said of his grandparents. "They owned their farm, harvested their own produce. As time grew on, it evolved into a whole restaurant scene, from selling produce to using that produce to create dishes and so on."

Full service and warm hearts

Today, Gullo's offers a full-service menu known for mouthwatering burgers, daily specials, and savory back porch barbecue. There's also a mercantile that sells produce and take-home items like casseroles, baked goods, canned jellies, and pickles—as well as an e-commerce store for out-of-towners. "You can get just about anything we have shipped to your front door that's able to be shipped," said Hamilton.

The welcoming hospitality of Gullo's is another reason it's so popular. The staff treat all who visit like family, whether they're a first-timer or a regular. It's the kind of atmosphere everyone appreciates.

"It just feels wholesome, being in the right spot and doing the right things," Hamilton said. "We have staff members who are part of a good thing, and that's exciting to come into every day. The work is just part of it."

A business reborn

A success story in its third generation, the rise of Gullo's hasn't come without setbacks. In 2014, an electrical fire destroyed much of the original property. As devastating as it was, Hamilton and his family were determined to rebuild, using it as an opportunity to take the business to the next level.

"My grandparents were doing all this with side project kitchens and stuff, almost like food trailers," Hamilton said. "When we had the fire, we said, 'Hey, let's take our time, let's do this right. Let's build it on another scale where we can offer full service and people don't have to sit outside on the patio.'"

The rebuild took nearly nine months. In that time, they were able to expand and build a full-scale kitchen. "We added almost 20 indoor dining tables and full service. It just really shifted the whole aspect of the business, from to-go and pick-up orders to now you can have a meal in my grandparents' old dining room with the fireplace," he said. "It was really a good thing in the long run. As bad as it was, it was the greatest thing that ever happened to us."



> **"AT&T offered the bandwidth for us to continue to grow."**
>
> **Craig Hamilton**
> **General Manager**
> **Gullo's Fresh Produce and Bake Shop**

Expanding horizons

With Gullo's reopened and thriving, Hamilton set out to broaden his hospitality knowledge with the goal of one day applying it to the family business. In 2015, he left to open two new restaurant concepts and later worked under renowned chef Tom Colicchio at Craft in New York City.



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"I learned so much. I was just a sponge everywhere I went," said Hamilton. "Every job I worked, every kitchen I stepped into, I had notes on everything. Once I kind of went full circle, I packed my bags and said, 'I'm taking everything I learned, everything I've done, and I'm going back to my family's restaurant and we're going to do all this just like I've been doing it.'"

Soon, he was refreshing the Gullo's menu, streamlining operations, and adding elements of fine dining he'd picked up in his journeys. But as the restaurant grew busier, the staff had trouble keeping up using systems they'd used previously. Handwriting tickets and manually answering phones for to-go orders impacted service. For internet, they were relying on outdated copper line DSL service that would get backed up when things got busy.

A welcome upgrade

Fate works in mysterious ways, often bringing help when you least expect it. For Gullo's, it came in the form of an AT&T Business sales executive stopping in to give its much heralded menu a try.

He hadn't been to Gullo's before. But he'd heard how great their food was and how well they treated their customers. It just so happened he was also the perfect person to help solve the issues they were experiencing.

After lunch, the sales executive asked to speak with the person in charge of their phones and internet. Naturally, Hamilton was game.

"Craig had recently come back from New York and had big ideas for the restaurant and where he wanted to take it," the executive said. "I started talking to him about dedicated fiber and moving their phone lines to Voice over IP, and over the next several weeks, we were able to get it done."

A dedicated fiber connection would give Gullo's the speed and bandwidth it needed to power POS terminals and a VoIP phone system. Adding a Wi-Fi router to the network would add additional flexibility, enabling staff to work faster and more efficiently using wireless printers and tablets. To help simplify incoming calls and voicemails, he suggested AT&T Office@Hand to integrate calls and messaging into a single platform.

Hamilton was impressed. "When AT&T came to me with the fiber optic solution, I had been asking that question for years, 'Why don't we have it?'" he said. "They saw the vision that I had and understood how streamlined and efficient I needed our internet to be. They saw the potential for growth for the business and just delivered in every way."

Measurable results

In the months since the changeover, Gullo's has already seen big improvements in their dining room and outdoor barbecue pit, a popular new addition. "We've absolutely seen a growth in sales," said Hamilton.

Their online business has also taken huge leaps. "Our online ordering had several gaps before the fiber-optic switch, and we're up 38 percent to the day. It creates order tickets from our website and sends them to our digital terminals in seconds. It's really streamlined the whole process for us."



Of course, service is always top of mind when food is simmering and tables are full. If staff are unable to answer calls during a rush, AT&T Office@Hand helps them stay in touch with what matters.

"If a customer leaves a message or if we happen to miss a call, it directs all that to my emails with a point of contact, so you never lose track of your customers," Hamilton said. "That type of connection with your customers and customer care is everything. And I feel like we've been able to do that because of Office@Hand."

Cooking up the future

AT&T has a reputation for helping businesses reach new heights. With Gullo's, that experience was no different. But what impressed Hamilton the most was the personalized approach and dedication of the AT&T Business team.

"As a small business owner, I would've never changed my internet unless somebody came to me and said, 'Hey, let me help you with this,'" he said. "AT&T was there the whole way to make sure this was what we needed. They were a tremendous help in switching over our business lines and installing all our fiber optic systems. It nailed our ability to lock in the growth we needed as a business."

That growth continues as Hamilton brainstorms new ways to enhance the Gullo's experience, knowing he can always scale his connection to fit his needs. "Our next move is to relocate our back porch barbecue into its own brick-and-mortar," he said. "I wouldn't blink an eye to go with the same process. As far as my next project with AT&T, I think that would be a must."

Regardless of what the future holds, Hamilton is as committed as ever to building longer tables and shrinking fences through good food and hospitality. Just as his family has always done.

"When my grandparents started this back in the seventies, I'm not sure if their vision was ever this big," he said. "We've never been this successful. And I think that's carrying on through to our clientele. They can see it, they can feel it, and they can taste it. It's a good thing. I think people feel at home when they come to Gullo's."

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