

Customer Stories:

Automated Customs Experts Group

AT&T Business

Connectivity for critical operations

- **Business needs** - Network backup; better ways to stand out in a crowded market.
- **Networking solution** - Dedicated internet service and a cloud-based voice, fax, text, and conferencing system support the company's complicated international operations.
- **Business value** - Advanced technology helps the company satisfy current clients and win new business.
- **Industry focus** - Licensed customs brokering and bonded warehouse operations
- **Size** - 63,000 square feet of warehouse storage capacity plus satellite locations

About Automated Customs Experts Group

The Automated Customs Experts (ACE) Group is a licensed customs broker and bonded warehouse operator with more than 50 years of combined industry experience. Company officials consider their staff as teammates and the core of the company's strength. That's why ACE Group has made the wellbeing of their staff a top priority.

The situation

Constant communication is a vital component of the ACE Group's success. When the conduit that delivered internet service to its primary warehouse went down, the company had to rely solely on wireless connectivity to support its complex operations. The growing business needed a reliable, redundant network to support its vital work.

Solution

AT&T Business replaced the broken conduit and delivered highly reliable, redundant connectivity and voice services to the ACE Group. AT&T Dedicated Internet is a premier internet service that gives the company dedicated connectivity. And AT&T Office@Hand provides voice, fax, instant messaging, and audio and video conferencing that easily support ACE Group operations.



"Our business relies on constant communication with clients and U.S. Customs and Border Protection."

Francisco Ramirez
CEO, ACE Group

Supporting employees, satisfying customers

ACE Group Founder and CEO Francisco Ramirez is passionate about investing in his employees. "The ACE Group's purpose is to become a place where great talent is bred through constant learning and reimagination of our craft," he said.

Equally important is delivering superior service to customers, whom Ramirez calls partners. "It starts with our preparation and give-first attitude, which drives our obsession to delight our partners."

The company has more than 50 years' combined experience and knowledge as a U.S. Customs broker. It also offers warehousing, freight-forwarding, and e-commerce fulfillment services. Operations are headquartered in San Diego, California, just miles from the Mexican border.

Satisfying customers is sometimes complicated by the dynamic environment at the border. "It's highly stressful because of the needs of our clients and ever-increasing demands from government agencies," Ramirez said.

Technology delivers a competitive edge

The company's warehousing operations present unique challenges. The ACE Group stores telecommunications equipment, medical supplies, and other items that require strict inventory accuracy standards.

Through a third party, it is a distribution center for cell tower hardware in San Diego County, a highly demanding

operation. “We are a key partner in maintaining cell tower operation,” he said. “Our client audits us frequently to measure our key performance indicators.”

Ramirez counts on infrastructure investments to satisfy client demands and give the company an added advantage among competitors. “Technology functions to level the field against bigger players,” he said. “To be an active player in the market, we always look for technology to assist us in becoming more competitive.”

Keeping up with technology and lean manufacturing principles also help the company fulfill its commitment to its partners. “It requires a level of accuracy and having the correct information in the system,” Ramirez said. “The customer audits us often to be sure we’re sending the correct parts to the correct sites. We depend heavily on reliable internet service.”

Cesar Laborin, the ACE Group’s Operations Vice President, concurred. “I need 100% reliability on my access points,” he said. “That’s the only way I can operate my warehouse.”

Warehouse workers use radio frequency wireless scanners to collect and transmit data to the warehouse management system. Laborin noted, “One-hundred percent reliability requires good, steady service in the warehouse, so there are no operation interruptions for our customers.”

Being prepared with system redundancy

The ACE Group’s communication system lost vital redundancy after the warehouse’s connectivity went down. To make matters worse, the network provider decided it was too expensive to repair or replace. This left the ACE Group without a safety net. They had a wireless network to support its essential functions, but no backup connectivity in case their primary network went down.



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> **Cesar Laborin**
> Vice President of Operations, ACE Group

“Our business relies on constant communication with clients and U.S. Customs and Border Protection,” Ramirez said. “Clients always want to import yesterday, so we are in a really tight timeframe to process the paperwork.”

Ramirez called a friend at AT&T Business—someone with whom he had networked at Stanford University and the Latino Business Action Network. AT&T agreed to repair the conduit. This enabled the ACE Group to take advantage of AT&T connectivity and cloud-based voice services.

Support for critical functions

AT&T Dedicated Internet gives the ACE Group a dedicated connection with the same upload and download speeds. The technology also provides proactive network monitoring and maintenance, along with industry-leading performance. The dedicated connection delivers fast and affordable internet speeds, and comes with guaranteed high levels of service availability. Critical functions that depend on internet connectivity will keep running.

> "We need our access points to distribute the signal throughout the warehouse. With AT&T Dedicated Internet, the speed and reliability are constant, and we haven't had any issues."
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> CEO, ACE Group

The service works well for the ACE Group, easily supporting its complex new enterprise resource planning system (ERP). "We need our access points to distribute the signal throughout the warehouse," Ramirez said. "With AT&T Dedicated Internet, the speed and reliability are constant. We haven't had any issues."



The ERP system will do more than increase the efficiency of the ACE Group's business processes, Laborin said. It will also benefit the ACE Group's customers. "A lot of our competitors use cobbled-together 'Frankenstein' systems," he said. "They've got one system for accounting, another for operations, and a third for brokerage data. We're consolidating all our services, so basically that will be a one-stop shop for our customers."

Using AT&T Business services also adds a layer of confidence, Laborin noted. "The name AT&T makes me feel at ease because I know the company is going to back us up, period."

Investing in people and networks

In addition to adding AT&T Dedicated Internet service, the ACE Group replaced its phone system with AT&T Office@Hand. This cloud-based solution delivers highly reliable voice services, fax, instant messaging, and audio and video conferencing. Ramirez and Laborin can use it to reach individual staff members just by dialing four digits, and communicate with all workers over the warehouse speakers.

AT&T Office@Hand positioned the company well to continue operations when the pandemic struck. While other companies struggled to move to the cloud, the ACE Group was already there. Managers could communicate with employees working offsite as easily as with those working in the warehouse.

The communication systems work well to support Ramirez's vision. "Our culture and environment are important," he said. "We work day-to-day with our teammates to help them grow as people and as teammates. We want to grow as a business, but we also want our people to grow with us and be happy at their job and at home with their family."

Building up the company's staff and networks has had a positive impact on the ACE Group's prospects, Ramirez said. "AT&T Business helps us operate on a Six Sigma Level with more than 96.6% accuracy in operations processes, inbounds, outbounds, and order fulfillment. We can compete with anyone in the market because our staff, our infrastructure, and service providers allow us to do that."



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