

SONOMA COUNTY FARM BUREAU REAPS PRODUCTIVITY BENEFITS

WITH HELP OF COMCAST BUSINESS

SITUATION

- Sonoma County Farm Bureau represents 3,000+ farm and ranch families in California
- Multi-faceted communications keep members and legislators informed on key topics

CHALLENGE

- Limited bandwidth from slow T1 connectivity
- Need to support staff's Internet needs, member communication including website development, social media updates, and newsletter publication

SOLUTION

- Comcast Business Internet
- Comcast Business VoiceEdge™

RESULTS

- High-performance Internet for online research, advocacy and content publishing
- Improved efficiencies for staff
- Reliable cloud-based voice service with innovative mobility features help employees stay accessible to members

NONPROFIT AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATION TAPS BUSINESS INTERNET AND CLOUD-BASED VOICE SERVICES TO SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL, ECONOMIC, LEGISLATIVE, AND ADVOCACY PROGRAMS

AGRICULTURAL NON-PROFIT RELIES ON PERSONAL TOUCH TO CONNECT WITH MEMBERS

The Sonoma County Farm Bureau is an independent, nonprofit organization that represents more than 3,000 farm and ranch families and other agricultural industry constituents in Sonoma County, California. World-renowned as an epicenter of U.S. winemaking, Sonoma County produces a diverse range of agriculture products that also includes livestock, poultry, vegetables, apples, nursery plants, and grains, among other products.

Charged with preserving and protecting the agricultural lifestyle for local farmers and ranchers, the farm bureau acts as the voice of its members to local, state and federal legislatures. It also serves as a source of agricultural information for bureau members, and offers community programs aimed at helping children to foster a passion for agriculture, including scholarships.

To stay connected to its members, the farm bureau offers seminars and workshops and issues a monthly newsletter covering topics ranging from legislation and farm safety to drought conditions. Farm bureau administrators also communicate with members via individual meetings, phone calls, events and social media.

"Agriculture and the production of food are paramount to fueling our local economic engine. We do our best to advocate for, and inform, a broad range of farmers and ranchers, including traditional, organic and small backyard gardeners. We also do our best to communicate with our members in whatever format suits them – whether that's in-person, over the phone, via a monthly newsletter or through social media," said Steven Knudsen, Communications and Development Coordinator for the Sonoma County Farm Bureau

HIGH-PERFORMANCE INTERNET AND RELIABLE PHONE SERVICE CRITICAL TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATIONS EFFORTS

With the farm bureau growing at a steady rate and member's desire for a constant stream of information related to agriculture, the group's five employees realized they needed a faster way to communicate with its members.

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Steven Knudsen
Communications and
Development Coordinator
Sonoma County Farm Bureau

The farm bureau relied on a legacy T1 line with only 1.5 Megabit per second connection (Mbps) for Internet access. However, the Internet was playing an increasingly critical role in daily operations and the slow connection was insufficient for the employees' needs. Employees needed to track weather, legislative and labor issues and also to collaborate with similar organizations in other counties and states, and they could not upload or download content fast enough. Employees often resorted to using their personal mobile devices to make phone calls and access the Internet.

“We had a Facebook page, but it was really passive. We just did not have the bandwidth to support active engagement in the social media world. We had a garden hose, but we needed a fire hose!” Knudsen said.

COMCAST BUSINESS INTERNET AND NEXT-GEN VOICE HELP IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY AND INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY

After reviewing available alternatives, the Farm Bureau selected Comcast Business to provide Internet and voice services. “I did some research and found that Comcast Business was a cost-effective option for our needs, but it was working with the great staff that made it an easy decision to switch,” said Knudsen.

Comcast Business installed a 50 Mbps Internet service to provide scalable Internet access for employees to conduct research, create materials, collaborate with other organizations and communicate with members. Employees also rely on the upgraded connection to facilitate updates to the farm bureau website. “We’ve seen a huge jump in the amount of info we are able to process since we upgraded our connection,” Knudsen said.

With a new high-speed connection, the farm bureau has streamlined the production of the Sonoma-Marin Farm News, the organization's monthly publication for members, and also allowed the farm bureau to create and distribute periodic, image intensive “e-blasts” that highlight the good things member farmer, ranchers and agricultural partners are doing. Added Knudsen: “Previously, the transfer of large media files to and from our offsite designer was slow and would overwhelm the network. Now we both have fast access to a shared server where we can view and edit content seamlessly.”

The farm bureau is also using Comcast Business VoiceEdge™, a cloud-based voice and unified communications solution that delivers HD-quality voice service, a mobile app and call-forwarding features that send business voice calls to desktop phones, computers and mobile phones so bureau members can be accessible whether they are at their desk, visiting a member's farm or at a legislator's office in Sacramento.

Knudsen further added: “With lots of bandwidth and voice service support for multiple communications devices from Comcast Business, our network has shifted from an operational burden to a platform for productivity so we can focus all of our attention on the issues that matter to our local agricultural community.”