



Success Story

Farmers Telecommunications Cooperative Makes the Switch with Sangoma

THE CUSTOMER

Founded in 1952, Farmers Telecommunications Cooperative arose to meet the communications needs of rural Alabama where large investor-owned telcos were unwilling to extend their networks for such sparsely populated communities.

As a member-focused co-op, Farmers remains dedicated to providing the greatest value to their customers. To provide this value, Farmers has consistently been a pioneer in providing cutting-edge technology, offering new services often much earlier than any other provider. This has meant that residents in rural Alabama are today enjoying the speed and reliability of a world-class fiber network and the convenience of a provider intent on accommodating all of the networking and communication needs of its subscribers.



CHALLENGES

A pioneering telecom cooperative sought to provide a sleek, full-featured Unified Communications (UC) solution to their business subscribers. They found that upgrading their existing carrier system was incapable of offering this because of both a lackluster potential feature set and upgrade pricing that represented a poor return on investment.



SOLUTIONS

Farmers found the right solution at the right price with Switchvox from Sangoma. This solution offered them a platform capable of being offered to their customers as either a true hosted solution in their datacenter or as an on-premise UC PBX to accommodate the needs of every business account.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

As a co-op, Farmers provides internet, tv, voice, fiber, networking, and home automation to its subscribers for competitive prices. While the majority of its customer base are residential users needing internet, tv, and basic home phone services, Farmers still serves thousands of business accounts that need more advanced network and communications technology.

Many of these business accounts have been renting legacy key phone systems for ten to fifteen years, meaning that, often, when a problem arose, the most cost-effective solution was upgrading to a new phone system. Farmers decided it was time to take the next step and provide a true Unified Communications (UC) platform for their business subscribers.

Researching their options, Farmers first looked at the possibility of upgrading their existing soft-switch system that they had been using to provide basic voice services. Unfortunately, they found that the scant return on investment of that solution did not make sense for their market.

With all of the additional licensing and upgrades they needed, the price was untenably high, and the system would still lack the sleek, full-featured functionality they needed to compete in the market against larger carriers.

THE SOLUTION FROM SANGOMA

At the start of their search for a new solution to offer their customer, Farmers was really looking for two different solutions. They wanted a UC platform they could host in their datacenter and offer as a true cloud-based UC solution to their subscribers. And they also wanted a robust on-premise solution to offer to their existing on-premise customers currently using the older legacy key systems.

Marlon Williamson, Supervisor of Sales Engineering and Business Services at Farmers, said they investigated options like Asterisk, which he had seen working for a previous employer. Ultimately, however, they decided that a fully open source platform did not make sense for their business.

Fortunately for Farmers, Switchvox, the commercial turnkey solution from Sangoma, gives them the ability to satisfy the needs of all their customers with the same solution.

Building on the power of Asterisk, Switchvox provides a robust, full-featured UC platform for all end users. For those Farmers customers who want to replace an aging on-premise key system, Switchvox can be deployed on-premise for purchase or rental. And for other customers, Farmers can act as a full-solution MSP, providing Switchvox hosted in their VM datacenter and paid for via a monthly service charge per user seat.

THE RESULTS

Farmers has had phenomenal success with Switchvox, and the co-op has been very pleased with the value it brings. According to Williamson, the features you get from Switchvox for the price you pay is a very good deal for a Sangoma partner or service provider. And the great value Switchvox offers service providers, in turn, makes it a very economical choice for customers, as evidenced by the Farmers business model. Their biggest niche for business accounts is the 10 to 15 seat customers, many of whom are already paying hundreds a month in system rental fees plus full retail price per business voice line.

For these customers, Farmers can offer three options: 1) a full service Cloud package where customers pay monthly per seat and have the option to rent or buy IP phones, 2) an on-premise rental package where the system appliance and phone are rented for a monthly fee, or 3) the full on-premise package purchased outright by the customer.

What this all means is that a business customer can make their sometimes four-digit phone bill go away for a couple hundred dollars a month, while enjoying a massive upgrade in functionality.

Not only did Farmers adopt Switchvox as their business voice solution for customers, they adopted it as their own business communications platform and use it themselves, with over 120 seats of their own. The value of Switchvox was not all that impressed Farmers however. Williamson said that Farmers thrives on the quality support they have provided their subscribers for decades, so the support their solution provider delivers is a crucial indicator for them.

In fact, Farmers had lost faith in other solutions as a result of the poor quality support they received. So, they were pleasantly surprised to find that Sangoma support for Switchvox is prompt, friendly, and provided around the clock, every day of the year. Plus, Farmers is thrilled about the ways offering Switchvox as their business communications platform bolsters other parts of the business. For example, by acting as a full-service, in-house MSP/IT office, there are a lot of opportunities to provide networking services, such as firewalls, PoE switches, and more, providing even more value while earning more revenue from a given customer.

All in all, Farmers is very pleased with their choice to adopt Switchvox. It offers them a lot of flexibility in how they can sell to different customers, while still providing good support, great value, and an exceptional Unified Communications experience.