



Four Companies Become One



Contents

I

Four companies in search of one enterprise solution

II

Accounting for efficiency

III

Delivering a better customer experience

IV

Summary: A trusted partner for a complex company


About

When your internal systems are split among different subsidiary companies, divisions, or other corporate silos, it makes your work less efficient. This has a negative effect on your staff, who spend their time on manual processes that could and should be automated. That effect also trickles out to your customers, as you spend time doing redundant work that you could spend improving your customer experience.

It doesn't have to be that way. When you unite companies or departments under a single software system for accounting, operations, and other enterprise functions, your processes become more efficient. You can also put important automation tools in the hands of your customers to make their experience better, too.

That's what Range Telephone Cooperative found when they decided to unite their software systems in a single enterprise system.





1 Four companies in search of one enterprise solution

Founded in 1953, Range Telephone Cooperative has served southeastern Montana and northeastern Wyoming for more than 70 years. Along the way, they acquired Dubois Telephone Exchange, Inc., formed RT Communications from sixteen Wyoming exchanges purchased from US West, and formed Advanced Communications Technology, Inc. to help expand a long-haul fiber network.

These various business decisions meant that, by the late 1990s, Range Telephone Cooperative was a conglomeration of four separate companies. Each of these four companies had their own accounting software, plant records, and other systems.

When Rob Johnstone became CEO of Range Telephone Cooperative in 2018—after being with the company for over a decade—he knew their systems needed to be combined. “We did everything times four. We logged into separate databases, there was a lot of swivel chair maintenance [maintaining two separate systems at once], our billing was times four, and our plant records were too. There was no automation for the convenience of our customers. It was digital, but not automated.”

Johnstone assembled a team from the four companies and from various departments — including accounting, plant operations, and customer relations — to listen to presentations from vendors, and finally decided to partner with National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC) for accounting and operations solutions.

Initially, the Range team had some concerns with the change. “If someone is doing this big of a transition,” reflects Johnstone, in retrospect, “it would be better to find champions throughout the organization and try to bring them along.” But, over time, Johnstone’s entire staff was won over. How? They saw how much more efficient a single system made them.



Accounting for efficiency

As Johnstone describes Range Telephone’s (and its subsidiaries’) switch to a single platform, three themes emerge. All of them speak to the improved efficiencies Range’s internal team experienced:

1. **Automating manual processes.** Accounting systems across four different companies were complicated, with separate databases, several inter-company transactions every month, and the need to code time across divisions. The process used to be manual, with journal entries that Range Telephone’s legacy system couldn’t handle. Those journal entries became a series of complex spreadsheets, which was primarily how they managed their ledger and inventory records. With a single accounting system, the process across the four companies became integrated, automated, and seamless.
2. **Facilitating communication so four companies could become one.** With a single system in place, everyone at Range now sees shared information in a single, unified view. This has been a game-changer for systems like inventory and plant records, which, according to Johnstone, “were really a mess because of how manual we were.” A shared system allowed Range to consolidate its four companies under a single brand (simply called Range) in the summer of 2020, operating under the motto “One Company, One Network.”
3. **Saving time and money.** Johnstone says the time savings for his team have been “astounding,” estimating that the team used to spend at least 30 hours per month just managing their accounting and inventory spreadsheets. Beyond that, he says at least another 30 hours per month were saved across systems. The efficiencies have been so immense that Johnstone says, “When a staff member has left or retired, we have individual conversations about those positions: do we need them backfilled, or have we recognized enough efficiency that we don’t need to? That’s been huge on the bottom line.”



Delivering a better customer experience

With NISC's Provisioning in place company-wide, Range was able to introduce automated self-service tools that improve their customers' overall experience. These tools include:

1. **Service upgrades and downgrades.** Range customers can now log into their accounts and upgrade or downgrade their speeds and packages automatically. Because these tools are available via the Range website, customers can order faster speeds the moment they need them.
2. **Online bill pay.** Range is now able to offer this important service—considered standard for most companies these days—to its customers. Online bill pay is more convenient for many customers, especially those in younger generations, and has the added benefit of fewer late or missed payments.
3. **Temporary disconnects.** If customers need to turn off service for a period of time—for example, customers who escape snowy Montana and live in warmer climates during the winter—they can schedule those disconnections and reconnections from the comfort of their homes.

These tools improve the overall customer experience for Range by allowing customers to manage their services on their own time. These services are available 24/7/365, not just during Range's normal Monday-to-Friday customer service hours. Putting these types of modern conveniences into your customers' hands is a surefire way to increase satisfaction and retention.

IV

Summary: A trusted partner for a complex company

The transition from multiple companies with their own systems to a single company with a single, shared enterprise system has revolutionized the way Range does business. Johnstone values the partnership Range has with NISC. “As an NISC Member, it feels like we have a real seat at the table,” he says. “There’s hardly any wait time, especially for mission-critical issues. NISC doesn’t over-promise and leave you frustrated. They’re very realistic about timelines and expectations, and they always meet or exceed them.”

After engaging with NISC for accounting and operations solutions, Range recently started using NISC’s mapping tools, too. Johnstone says, “We originally picked NISC for everything but mapping at first.” But after Range’s mapping vendor changed ownership and introduced new complexities, “we’re now converting over to Mapping with NISC.”

Having completed this transition, Johnstone has important advice for anyone considering a new software solution: “If you’re an organization — especially one with some complexities to it — I’d look at a vendor with a full suite of solutions to help alleviate some of those challenges and reduce the swivel chair.”

Finally, when Johnstone remembers Range’s transition to a shared system, he talks about Jane, one of his employees: “Jane had experience with old-school databases. To see her being an expert at maintaining our legacy network, then go through this process, and now speak so highly of our new NISC system — to me that says a lot.”



Can your company benefit from a fully integrated enterprise system, improved efficiencies, and a better customer experience? If so, NISC would love to talk with you. Call them at 866.999.6472 or visit nisc.coop to learn more.



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