A case study on how Wabash Mutual Telephone Company partnered with National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC) to integrate datasets across the enterprise.

Embracing Conversion

With two distinct billing cycles—one at the beginning of the month and one mid-month—Wabash Mutual Telephone Company, a broadband service provider (BSP) serving rural counties in Ohio and Indiana, faced significant inefficiencies. Employees found themselves performing redundant tasks and experiencing communication problems, leading to frustration across multiple departments. It was clear they needed a more streamlined billing system.

Having gone through several system conversions throughout his 36-year career, Wabash Mutual Telephone's CEO Mike Boley knew the challenges of implementing new solutions. "It's horrible to go through a billing conversion," he attests. "It takes a lot of time; it takes a lot of work. You think you understand the software platform that you're moving to, but soon understand you don't quite understand it all."

But regardless of the obstacles he knew it would bring, Boley and his team were up for the challenge. Because Boley had been attending NISC's annual Member Information Conference (MIC) for years, he already knew about NISC's Financials offering and the efficiencies it could bring.

In 2019, Wabash Mutual Telephone took the plunge and converted to NISC's Financials solution. This strategic decision aimed to alleviate inefficiencies and set the stage for enhanced operational effectiveness and an improved customer experience (CX).

NISC's Financials Solution: The Shazam Moment

To Boley's surprise, the software conversion process wasn't as painful as past conversions he had experienced because his employees worked closely with the on-site NISC staff to ensure they thoroughly understood the new solution and could use it proficiently.

"From when the project started, it took about 3 ½ months before the actual conversion took place," Boley recalls. "NISC wanted to understand how our data was laid out, a process that went pretty smoothly."

He also points out that they chose to convert at year-end, their busiest season. He said they were worried that taking this big step during their busiest time could cause delays and problems, but they wanted to do it that way to get a clean, fresh start.

Wabash Mutual Telephone's first billing cycle began immediately after the conversion in early January 2020. When employees used the new NISC Financials solution for the first time, they were amazed.

> *"It was a Shazam moment," Boley asserts. "The billing went off without a hitch and we started to see the benefits immediately."*

Over the 4 ½ months post-conversion, NISC continued to support Wabash Mutual Telephone both over the phone and through on-site visits to fine-tune the company's usage of the solution's capabilities. Since the Financials solution is highly customizable, each department could configure their own views to meet their individual objectives.

NISC also ensured employees were trained to properly leverage the solution—both in the office and remotely—using the NISC iVUE® AppSuite, a mobile tool that extends NISC solutions beyond the desktop, connecting processes between the office and the field to dramatically streamline efficiencies.

Once they had successfully integrated the new solution, efficiencies began to grow exponentially. Duplicate entries and redundant processes were eliminated, errors were reduced, and employees had more time to focus on value-added tasks. Management was immediately able to make more informed decisions, identify trends, and pinpoint areas for improvement based on accurate and timely data. Communication and collaboration between departments were streamlined, allowing better cash flow management across the board.

The effects were so immediate and impactful that Wabash Mutual Telephone began considering adding more available NISC solutions to increase efficiencies and improve overall business practices.

Enterprise-wide Conversions Yielded Immediate Results

Based on his experience with the Financials conversion, Boley knew the best way to introduce additional solutions was to implement them gradually. By introducing each new solution one at a time, he would be able to ensure optimal performance.

After using this successful approach for four years, Wabash Mutual Telephone has now fully integrated multiple NISC solutions. Boley highlighted a few benefits the company has experienced ever since.

Financials Solution

Beyond general accounting, they have integrated many other components of NISC's Financials solution, including Human Resources and Payroll. Now, management can oversee employee benefits and payroll, manage resources like employee handbooks, and grant employees self-service capabilities to access their personnel-related information with ease from a centralized location.

They also integrated Plant Accounting, enabling it to track assets and easily oversee fleets and work orders. Boley also intends to implement Purchasing soon, which will integrate with other solutions to streamline material acquisitions from purchase orders to account inventory, speeding up the process and eliminating whole steps of labor.

"It's going to be a kind of A-to-Z system, and we're looking forward to that," says Boley.

Service Solution

Wabash Mutual Telephone has also integrated NISC's robust Service solution. Now, the entire customer acquisition journey is not only streamlined, but it is a more pleasant experience for both employees and customers alike.

When a representative receives a call from a prospective customer, they can immediately process the order, including capturing billing information and setting up payments. Orders no longer get abandoned. Outages are communicated more effectively. Complaints are resolved much faster. And customers are empowered through messaging and account access solutions.

"The functionality has helped improve the customer experience considerably," Boley affirms. "And that's what we're really about."

He also affirms that the benefits translate to a competitive advantage. "We can provide an experience that the competition can't, and that's our edge. So all these benefits really add up."

Operations Solution

After integrating many aspects of NISC's Operations solution, plant and field employees immediately saw real-time efficiencies. With these solutions, dispatch can assign trouble tickets straight through iVUE® AppSuite. They can add any relevant notes about the customer, complaint or order. Thanks to the Scheduler component of the solution, they can view which technicians are on or off duty, who is currently delayed due to weather or traffic, and who just got approved for PTO and when.

Technicians can view tickets through iVUE® AppSuite as well. They can add notes. They can contact customers to let them know when to expect them. They can alert dispatch of unforeseen delays. They can view inventory and stock their trucks more accurately. And, most importantly, they can take control of their days to perform their responsibilities much more efficiently.

"We do a lot of our own construction," Boley explains. "Now, we're able to keep everything organized and get service to the customer as efficiently as we can, which ultimately keeps costs down and makes the installation quicker."

These results help empower a customer service team to deliver an amazing CX.

Exponential Efficiencies Gained, Both Forecasted and Unexpected

The more NISC solutions Wabash Mutual Telephone has implemented, the more efficiencies it has realized—ones expected and ones unforeseen.

For instance, the company is a member of the Com Net Incorporated (CNI) Consortium, which they utilize for after-hour services and tech support. CNI is able to access the company's data through the NISC enterprise, allowing them to provide live customer and tech support, take orders, accept payments, and even page an employee, if necessary.

Through SmartHub® Order Management (SHOM), their customers now have a self-service option for adding, upgrading, or canceling service. SHOM also has enhanced and simplified the sign-up process. As a result, they are now seeing a significant increase in self-service from customers, which many customers prefer.

They have also seen an increase in customers using electronic payments. "Adoption has skyrocketed," Boley affirms, pointing out that even accepting paper checks is easier through NISC's image capture capabilities. Overall, the cooperative drastically reduced its paper usage and continues to find new ways to grow paperless transactions through the NISC enterprise.

Wabash Mutual Telephone is currently in the process of analyzing their use of NISC's Business Intelligence & Reporting solution, with the goal of being able to query live data and immediately create dashboards, saving vast amounts of time and resources.

The Proof Is in the Metric

The benefits of implementing NISC solutions have been so great, Boley admits they are difficult to quantify. "Our involvement with NISC has made us considerably more efficient across the board," he says.

When asked what he would tell another provider considering an NISC partnership, he replied, "I would say you're going to see conveniences that you probably don't even know about, because that's been our experience."

Boley has one metric he points to as a result of using the NISC enterprise. "We haven't had to hire more people," he asserts. "So as our company has grown, we still have the same size Accounting Department as we did 20 years ago even though our customer base is 40% larger and we serve a far larger geographical area."

"I will have to say that we've had some top-notch folks involved in the conversion," Boley concludes on his experience partnering with NISC to successfully convert systems. "You can tell that they've worked in the telecom or power industry and can bring that expertise to your organization."