

211 SAN DIEGO

inContact's Instant Scalability Helps Local Hotline Prepare for Disaster



At 211 San Diego, a non-profit that serves as a first point of contact for people in need of community assistance, call volumes can explode in a heartbeat. The wildfires that swept the area in 2007, the recession that began a year later, and the H1N1 flu outbreak of 2009-2010 triggered massive spikes in callers seeking help. When the organization needed to replace its call center equipment, their top-of-the-list requirements for the new system included easy expansion and seamless routing of overflow calls to supplementary sites. inContact's on-demand call center platform rose to the occasion with its ability to **»quickly scale up and make changes on the fly in the event of a disaster, »implement an at-home program to handle larger call volumes, »free up full-time in-house IT specialists, and »upgrade telephony while saving money by eliminating on-site installation or capital investment.**



Business

Non-profit community referral service
www.211sandiego.org

Challenges

- Outdated call center system
- Lack of scalability for emergencies
- No easy support for home users
- Limited functionality
- Full-time technician needed
- Need for low-cost solution

Results

- New system in six weeks
- Instant port expansion ability
- Multiple disaster call routing options
- Easy work-at-home setup
- Improved reporting
- Better quality assurance
- Increased productivity
- Drag-and-drop script changes
- Saved thousands of dollars in capital investments
- No in-house maintenance needed

Crisis Intervention

211 San Diego is a lifeline for area residents in distress. Part of a growing network of local 211 services designed to centralize social and disaster services information at one easy-to-remember, three-digit phone number, the organization connects people to over 6,000 community programs, ranging from food and housing assistance to care for an ailing parent or child.

Help is provided on a 24/7 basis through the 211 hotline, online searchable database, email, text and chat. In addition, during a disaster, the group works with the County of San Diego's Office of Emergency, as well as the County of San Diego's Public Health Department, to disseminate information ranging from road closures to shelter locations, and acts as the central communications hub for various entities involved in disaster response.

In late 2007, 211 San Diego recognized that it was facing its own crisis in the form of its nine-year-old Inter-Tel call center infrastructure. Inter-Tel had discontinued support for the platform, presenting a risk in the event of system failure. Maintenance was labor-intensive, requiring a full-time technician and time-consuming coding to change IVR scripts or call routing. The system lacked key quality assurance features such as complete call recording. Most importantly, it lacked the flexibility to increase capacity or easily reroute calls during a crisis.

"During the Southern California wildfires in October 2007, we answered 120,000 calls in 10 days. That's as many as we handled in the previous fiscal year. After that, our average daily call volume jumped from 400 to 650 because more people were aware of our services," said Chief Executive Officer John Ohanian. "It was clear that we needed a more robust phone system that could accommodate our growth as well as temporary traffic surges, and we needed it before our legacy system had a critical malfunction."

Scalability in the Cloud

In early 2008, a 15-member committee consisting of 211 San Diego personnel as well as local technology professionals from Qualcomm Incorporated and other leading community organizations launched a search to determine which call center solution would best meet the organization's needs. After evaluating both conventional premise-based systems and newer cloud-based platforms delivering all telephony services over a high-speed Internet connection, the committee selected inContact's cloud-based solution for the scalability benefits as well as the cost and maintenance advantages.

In terms of scalability, inContact's cloud-based architecture and unique company-owned telecommunications network make it possible to add ports and reroute traffic on a moment's notice. inContact can allocate additional server space or adjust call destinations with a few clicks with no need to add switch capacity, provision new circuits, or ask the customer's carrier to change call flows. Overflow calls can therefore be easily directed to the homes or cell phones of 211 San Diego's Customer Service Representatives (CSRs), volunteers, or other 211 services or call centers – all through a unified call routing system that directs calls to the next available representative, regardless of location.

In terms of cost, inContact eliminated the need to purchase and maintain expensive installed phone switches, automatic call distributors (ACDs), interactive voice response (IVR) systems and related components, since inContact maintains the entire telephony infrastructure in the cloud. This saved 211 San Diego several thousand dollars in capital investment as well as ongoing infrastructure, maintenance and replacement costs over conventional call center packages.

Bringing It Home

In October 2009, after a six-week deployment that also included installation of a new hosted PBX, 211 San Diego retired its legacy call center platform and put inContact in charge. By that time, the organization's average monthly call volume had soared from 18,000 the previous year to more than 28,000, and the CSR staff had tripled in size to meet the rising demand.

In addition to gaining scalability that was necessary to support both steady growth and unpredictable fluctuations in call traffic, migrating to inContact equipped 211 San Diego with easy, work-at-home setup for emergency situations as well as everyday scheduling. With the ability to access inContact software from any broadband-enabled computer, most of the organization's CSRs now work from home for a portion of the week, including night shifts. This provides important job flexibility as well as helping to ensure 24/7 availability of personnel specifically trained to assess callers'

needs and match them to the best community resources.

"Enabling our phone staff to work from home would have been an expensive project with our former system, and that kind of investment would not have been advisable given the age of the equipment," said Chief Technology Officer Rodney Sackett. "inContact gave us a work-at-home option with no upcharge or special equipment needs."

"At 211 San Diego, we are always preparing for a surge in demand from our community, whether it's from a new program introduced or local disaster or crisis. So we need call center technology that supports that mission. inContact gives us the instant scalability and flexibility to add seats and change call destinations in an instant. We can't get those features from an in-house platform."

John Ohanian,
Chief Executive Officer
211 San Diego

Tools to Excel

With inContact now shouldering software maintenance, troubleshooting, and managing performance responsibilities, 211 San Diego's technology team can focus on mission-driven projects while simply overseeing the telephony component of their operations. Easy drag-and-drop IVR script and call flow changes have eliminated coding duties, while quality assurance has been strengthened via inContact features such as full call recording, comprehensive reporting tools, and an agent-level dashboard displaying real-time call center activity.

These and other tools are helping 211 San Diego maximize staff productivity. Managers have also set up an alert system that can nip problems in the bud. If no agents are logged into a queue that receives a call, for example, Service Delivery Manager-Brandon Dotts-and his team receive an email that allows them to intervene. If port usage exceeds a pre-defined threshold, designated personnel are immediately informed. And so on.

To the thousands of callers who turn to 211 San Diego every month, the result is smoother everyday operations as well as better emergency response, ensuring an efficient and high-quality service they can rely on. As of this writing, inContact is providing the same benefits to more than a dozen other local 211 services. For these organizations, the platform is more than a phone system; it's a helping hand in serving those in need.