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**What can a critical access hospital teach you about the future of work?**

The digital transformation of

**CLAY COUNTY HOSPITAL**

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# Clay County Hospital CIO: How a Critical Access Hospital Is Embracing the Future of Work

Clay County Hospital is located in a farm belt in Flora, Illinois, about 100 miles east of St. Louis. It's known as a rural "critical access" hospital which handles basic trauma services and a range of labs, radiology, and testing. It does not have lucrative businesses such as cardiac care or birthing units. Its clinics provide outpatient services.

## Upgrading the IT Infrastructure

One of CIO Phil Bute's major transformation initiatives at the hospital has been to move resources to the cloud. Rather than reinvest in new servers, he just completed a six-month project to shift electronic medical records to a cloud service, saving hundreds of thousands of dollars in the process. He's also looking at cloud storage options and SaaS programs to run a number of internal business functions.

In addition, Bute has initiated to upgrade Clay County Hospital's IT infrastructure and improve its overall business delivery mechanism. He has replaced computers, leveraged the cloud, and revamped his own IT department's way of handling tasks.

"I inherited a real IT mess here," he said. "It's been quite an effort, and, being a small, remote hospital, we didn't always have the resources to do what we needed to do, but we're making a lot of progress."

"I was at a conference three years ago, and I did a presentation for the county board on cloud-based services," he said. "At the time, I said I don't really think we're going to be in a position to use the cloud anytime soon. But, here we are, three years later: We're doing it."

## Modernizing its Communications Approach

Before it shifted to a modern, VoIP-based phone system, Clay County Hospital had communication problems—on multiple levels.

To start with, people were having trouble actually connecting with each other by phone. The three analog phone systems that served the rural hospital and its four clinics operated on separate networks, so workers couldn't transfer between buildings, create conferences or forward calls.

The calls hospital employees did try to make often fell into what Bute called "phone hell." A study by the southeastern Illinois institution's phone service provider revealed that 67 percent of the company's outgoing calls disconnected at some point in the conversation, creating business problems and issues with customer service.

Since Clay County Hospital installed Fuze, the dropped-call problem has been solved. Calls are connecting, inside and outside, and according to Bute, a larger set of communication-related issues the organization identified are improving, too.

> "The fact we were losing two thirds of our calls was brutal," Bute recalled. "It was really getting in the way of our ability to do business."

## Working from Anywhere

The unified communications system has helped with communication in other ways by connecting the digital workforce in a modern way. Call-forwarding features give workers the ability to make calls and get messages anywhere—from home, from conferences, in transit from department to department. Night workers can dial into Fuze meetings from home rather than come in during their off hours. If someone's on vacation, departments record meetings to keep the worker up to speed.

"In the yearly employee satisfaction surveys, one of the things we always got dinged on was communication," Bute said. "You'd hear administration or management wasn't communicating enough with the frontline staff. This makes it so much easier to communicate with them all the time. You can send them those messages, you can do those Fuze meetings. They don't have to physically be in the building, but it makes them feel like they're still part of the team."

The CIO said follow-up surveys have shown a sharp increase in employee satisfaction on matters of communication.

The ability to connect better from home allowed Clay County Hospital to indirectly create more space for expansion. The hospital assigned 30 of its 325 employees to work remotely, hooking up billing personnel and coders to home-based systems and freeing up room for more workers in clinical services.



"It allowed us to expand the hospital without spending millions of dollars to actually rebuild it," Bute said.

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## Adapting Work Styles

The new system has required workers to make a few changes in their work styles. Network constraints forced the hospital to start with 100 physical phones, down from 250 in the previous set-up. The new phones were placed in shared work spaces like clinical departments, radiology, the ER and laboratories, where workers needed ready access to handsets. Offices don't have dedicated phones; workers use softphones on their computers or forward calls to their cell phones.

"We had some growing pains with the transition, but people are much more comfortable with the new set-up now that they see how much more productive they can be."

**NAME:**
Phil Bute

**COMPANY:**
Clay County Hospital

**TITLE:**
Chief Information Officer

**PREVIOUS GIGS:**
Technology director at North Clay Community Unit School District #25 in Louisville, Illinois, and system administrator at The Republic newspaper in Columbus, Indiana

**INDUSTRY:**
Healthcare

**EMPLOYEE COUNT:**
325

**HOW HE CHANGED THE GAME:**
Using the Fuze platform, he streamlined internal and external phone communications, enabled 30 employees to work at home, and drove improvements in employee satisfaction. He also upgraded servers, shifted legacy IT functions to the cloud, and revamped IT's process for handling tasks.

Visionary leaders are changing the game for the modern workforce.

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