Case Study

⠿ CASE STUDY

Since 1953, the National Pharmaceutical Council (NPC) has sponsored and conducted scientific, evidence-based analyses of the appropriate use of pharmaceuticals and the clinical and economic value of pharmaceutical innovation. Over the years, breakthroughs in medical treatment through pharmaceuticals have largely improved patient care, but the increased use of pharmaceuticals has also resulted in questions about appropriate use and spending of health care dollars.

Based in Reston, Virginia, NPC supports numerous educational and research ventures advancing the appropriate use of pharmaceuticals for the betterment of human health. Sharing in its vision of demonstrating that pharmaceuticals, when used properly, can improve both patient treatment outcomes and the cost effective delivery of overall health care services, the NPC is supported by more than 20 research-based member companies.

The NPC communicates the economic, clinical and societal value of pharmaceuticals to a variety of health care stakeholders, including patients, clinicians, payers and policy makers through a strategy that includes the development of a wide breadth of intellectual assets, partnerships with member companies and outside organizations, and the dissemination of informative programs and products.

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The Challenge

The NPC staff is well-versed in the pharmaceutical industry, with extensive experience ranging from government health and regulatory agencies and academia, to advocacy groups and private health plans and providers. In the areas of information technology and support, however, NPC's small staff required outside expertise.

NPC had used several different companies for outside IT support, with varying degrees of success and reliability.   In fact, the small trade association had reached a critical juncture: NPC's in-house IT coordinator was quickly outpacing its outside vendor in terms of skill and knowledge. "We were at a crossroads where the vendor we were using couldn't help anymore - I'd learned everything he knew and was at the point where I knew more than he did!" says Mary Gail Swenson, Coordinator of Information Systems for NPC.

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NPC's need for consistent and knowledgeable IT support became even more acute when the organization suffered a disastrous server crash and back-up system failure. The outside IT vendor had configured the backup system and virus software incorrectly, resulting in not only the server's failure, but the back-up system's failure as well. When NPC attempted to restore its data from the back-up, they discovered that the system had only captured the top of the information store. The organization had lost nearly all of its data. "We had to take the hard drives out of the computers and take them to a data restorer, costing us around $3,000. Even then, didn't get all the data back," says Swenson. The association knew it needed to upgrade to avoid another potential damaging crash.

The Solution

NPC began its search for reputable vendors that could implement the upgrade and provide a stable network and back-up system. Because NPC wanted its IT solutions provider to be Microsoft certified, Nortec's capabilities and its MS certified engineers were a natural fit. "I was very impressed by Nortec and its capabilities," says Swenson. "We liked Nortec's approach and they seemed very easy to work with."

After considering several other vendors and conducting numerous meetings and interviews, NPC selected Nortec as its IT solutions provider.

Nortec began by performing a complete assessment of NPC's network status, wherein Nortec assessed the organization's hardware, software, licensing and security capabilities. After learning of the organization's priorities, problem areas, and IT goals, Nortec made detailed technology recommendations as well as discussed implementation plans. "Nortec went over each and every computer, listed all the software, checked our licenses, and gave us recommendations on various levels out security, capabilities, and benefits," says Swenson.

With its upgraded server and software, NPC's systems now have markedly improved features, its network is more stable, and as a result of the upgrade, the organization has even noticed an increase in productivity. And since a foolproof back-up system was a major priority for NPC, Nortec implemented Symantec Backup Exec with agents for their SQL database and Microsoft Exchange Information Store on a 1.6 TB autoloader. "The network meets our needs fully. The software we're now using is very intuitive and compatible - everyone here is very happy with our network's capabilities," says Swenson.

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A New Challenge

After its network upgrade, NPC began to wonder if other components of its IT infrastructure might need updating as well. "Microsoft products were working so well for us, and our existing phone system was very old and cumbersome to use, with very few features. I saw that Microsoft also offered VoIP technology, so I gave Nortec a call," says Swenson.

Nortec, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, conducted an assessment of NPC's existing phone system and explained the benefits and capabilities of the Shortel VoIP system. Nortec then provided a timeline, budget and implementation plan. "Nortec coordinated the process beautifully," says Swenson. "I was a hero for choosing Nortec."

With its new Shortel VoIP phone system installed, NPC couldn't be happier with its new telecommunications capabilities. "On a day-to-day basis, being able to redial from our computers and to retrieve voicemail from anywhere has really improved our efficiency and productivity," says Swenson. The Shortel VoIP system offers a multitude of features that improves NPC's workflow: conference calls are now simple to conduct, a 'hunt list' forwards calls from a main console to a second, third, or fourth location so calls are never unanswered, and because VoIP is internet-based, employees are able to dial directly from their PCs or laptops with the soft phone feature. "Having the calls routed to a number of locations - even our lunch room - saves us from having a dedicated person answer the phones," says Swenson. "It's really improved our business to have phones that are so intuitive and helpful."

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Benefits

NPC has been a Nortec customer for over 4 years, and has come to rely on Nortec not only for its day-to-day IT support, but for its ability to keep the association abreast of technology advancements. "I'm a believer in keeping up with technology - I don't want to play catch-up because I think it ends up costing more money," says Swenson.

And perhaps the best endorsement of Swenson's philosophy is the cost savings NPC has realized since implementing the Shortel VoIP system. "As a small company, we are saving over $10,000 per year. We are saving enough to buy the phones - not rent them - in just 2 years," says Swenson. "We've eliminated Verizon and our long distance carrier, and now we pay just one bill, which is much less now with VoIP."

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NPC's days of using multiple vendors for IT support have ended as well. With a routine maintenance plan in place, NPC hasn't needed nearly the amount of support it once required. But, Swenson stresses, "Nortec is there instantly when and if we need them. They're a wonderful company to work with. I sometimes feel as if we get special treatment, but I'm sure that's how they treat all their customers."

For more information on Nortec, please contact us at
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