

The Customer

Biloxi Mississippi, on the Gulf of Mexico, consists of 26 miles of white sand and the largest man-made beach in the world. Founded by French explorers in 1699, Biloxi is one of the oldest cities in the U.S. and home to approximately 50,000 people. Or at least it was prior to August 29th, 2005 when Hurricane Katrina blew ashore, taking lives and demolishing thousands of homes and businesses. **The Biloxi Housing Authority (BHA)** is the agency that works to provide housing in Biloxi to lower income families.

Founded in 1939, the Biloxi Housing Authority (BHA) works together with the City of Biloxi, various civic organizations, local businesses and banks to aggressively solve housing problems in Biloxi. The tragedy of Katrina - where the Biloxi Housing Authority lost approximately 60% of its housing units - only made the BHA's mandate even more crucial to the well-being of Biloxi's most beleaguered residents.

The Situation

The BHA is now in the process of replacing World War II-era, barracks-style housing with innovative, mixed-income communities in East Biloxi. They are modernizing and improving the existing low- to moderate-income housing for approximately 1,400 residents. Important resident facilities such as the Claudie M. Jones Computer Learning Center and the Beatrice Brown Community Center were also repaired after being heavily damaged. This time-critical situation means BHA is becoming even more reliant on information technology (IT) to operate, communicate and manage their business and help their 'customers'. With important, effectively life-altering deadlines, the BHA requires their technology infrastructure to "just work". BHA themselves survived hurricane Katrina, but not without their own 'scars'. Their existing server literally has salt-water deposits/corrosion on the bottom of it showing the level of flooding they experienced and a label on the rack-frame now showing "Katrina was here" and the date. This was just one of the reasons why they earmarked disaster-recovery/preparedness as critical to their business when BHA's Deputy Director, Lee Nethery, turned to his local Utility Service Provider, The Utility Company of West Tennessee to begin planning their infrastructure updates.

The Solution

Terry Cole, the owner of The Utility Company of West Tennessee, was brought in by Mr. Nethery and was entrusted to begin their upgrades post-Katrina. With an eye to the future, Cole also explained the benefits of moving towards a more proactive approach to their technology usage. The Utility Company presented BHA with a new alternative to either an internal resource or the typical break-fix outsourcing option for small and medium-sized businesses (SMB) available in the market. The Connected Office "managed" level program provided gave the BHA:

- **1-866-My-Utility Live helpdesk** to support end users with secure remote access to their network and desktops for on-demand service and training.
- **Remote monitoring and management** of their network, desktops/laptops, security and data-back-up 24x7.
- **Security & protection** – ongoing anti-virus and patch management service.
- **Online backup and storage** – remote backup of servers, desktops and laptops.
- **Asset & lifecycle management** – tracking of all hardware and software assets, including updates, usage and compliance.
- **Onsite Service** – emergency support, onsite maintenance, end-user training as required.
- **Network Assessment** – Complete overview of existing network topology and recommendations for improvement including disaster preparedness planning.

It is important to point out that the combination of the 1-866-My-Utility helpdesk and the Utility Service Center remote monitoring and management platform results in the majority of the BHA's support incidents being detected and resolved remotely - no downtime or onsite service calls.

The Result

In the first five months since becoming a Utility customer, Biloxi Housing has not had a single incident requiring onsite assistance. This means no unplanned or unwanted intrusions to their busy workdays and zero downtime. This was accomplished by having a thorough understanding of Biloxi's technology usage in advance of coming onboard, and thanks to proactive monitoring and management of their infrastructure in combination with access to our 1-866-My-Utility remote technical support team.

Recently, the post-Katrina disaster preparedness plan was put into action with the threat of Hurricane Gustav approaching Biloxi. The plan Utility and BHA put in place had contingencies for either evacuation OR redundancies in the case where evacuation wasn't possible. Therefore, on Friday Sept 5th, with Gustav fast approaching, BHA and Utility were prepared. As always, all critical servers were both automatically backed up/mirrored virtually and set up in a removable rack for easy extraction. This setup meant a simple move of a server rack from one floor to another on Friday to safe "high-ground". On the next day business day, Tuesday of the following week, the server rack was very simply moved back into place, plugged into the wall, and all employees had access to everything they needed to perform their jobs by 10:00 am.

Customer's Thoughts

"I approached Terry even before he officially became a Utility Service Provider", stated Lee Nethery, Deputy Director of BHA. "I had worked with Terry in the past and knew that his expertise would be just what we needed after our experience with Katrina. The time was right for us to take a good hard look at how we currently used technology at the office and how we wanted to use it going forward. Becoming linked with The Utility Company enabled Terry to provide us with not only the consultative expertise we required at the time of initial engagement, but also the proactive approach to managing our critical systems. The timing was perfect – and we couldn't be happier with the results to date. From a business continuity perspective, Gustav didn't frighten us this time."

Utility's View

"Biloxi's story is a prime example of two companies working well together – becoming strategic business partners," stated Mark Scott, President of The Utility Company. "Yes BHA is a customer, but their business needs really do become our concerns. We strive to become the 'virtual CIO' or 'trusted business advisor' to any SMB who opens their doors to us. We take that responsibility very seriously. I think, especially when you are talking about devastating situations like hurricanes, being able to take some of their business concerns off of their shoulders, lets them focus on what is important, their own well-being."

There is a NEW WAY – join The Utility Revolution!

The Utility Company is a single-source provider of technology, communications and business management solutions for small and medium-sized businesses across North America. Our Connected Office Technology-as-a-Service program provides a single point of contact for ALL things technology delivering the required hardware, software and service for a monthly fixed fee per user. Customers are supported by local Utility Service Providers delivering on-site service and business-technology consulting to address the two major problems plaguing businesses today:

Over-Spending - the average business spends **\$360 per user per month** on technology

Under-Utilization – unfortunately **only 15%** of this investment is actually utilized

Our mission is to ensure our customers only invest in the technology they require to **operate, communicate** and **manage** their business effectively. **Our vision** is to transform information technology into what it should be – **a utility**.