

Success Story: IMC Helps FOXPRO Improve Operations and Customer Service with Broadband Grant

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SITUATION

FOXPRO is a small but growing Lewistown, PA based manufacturer of digital game calls, decoys and accessories used in predator hunting. They are the Worldwide Leader in sales of goods within the predator industry.

The company's internal operations and external contacts with customers, partners and vendors were significantly hampered by FOXPRO's 3Mbit DSL Internet service, which was divided into three channels of 1Mbit DLS each. The limited connection was unable to keep up with the company's information technology needs and when it became saturated, operations came to a standstill.

Employees frequently complained they were unable to perform routine job duties and had to wait until other company functions requiring Internet traffic had been accomplished and sufficient bandwidth became available.

Likewise, customers faced lengthy waits to place orders and have credit card information processed, resulting in dropped calls, aborted online transactions and lost business. Customers who succeeded in placing orders but who later called to check the status of their orders also faced exceptionally long waits as FOXPRO attempted to access the external portals of its shipping partner to determine the status and location of packages.

In addition, an integral component of the company's customer service and marketing efforts involves the uploading of very large data files containing video and audio of animal calls. The company frequently experienced problems when attempting to upload these files to YouTube and other social media sites or send them to customers. Due to insufficient bandwidth, these attempted data exchanges would often crash or take tens of minutes to succeed.

FOXPRO also has an onsite studio in which the company produces a television show for the Outdoor Channel. The company's poor Internet connection affected FOXPRO's ability to download and evaluate clips of audio and video content for potential use on the show and limited the company's ability to view portions of its own program content.

Finally, the company's online banking functions — a significant component of FOXPRO's accounting processes - often required the company to reduce its Internet traffic manually to accommodate these transactions.

SOLUTION

Determined to overcome the obstacle that was stymieing its business, FOXPRO sought information and resources that could resolve the company's bandwidth woes. The company contacted The Mifflin County Industrial Development Corporation (MCIDC) for help and also searched on its own to identify an Internet service provider that could install and deliver the upgraded data connection needed to replace the company's insufficient 3Mbit DSL line.

Once aware of FOXPRO's issues with its Internet service, MDIDC's Rob Postal contacted SEDA-COG and Comcast to determine what solutions may be available to help the company obtain a broadband connection. Unfortunately, Comcast said it was unable to provide the fiber optic line the company needed. FOXPRO's requests for proposals from several other Internet providers resulted in only one company, Nittany Media, indicating it was able to install and deliver the level of service improvement FOXPRO required. Unfortunately, the \$25K, 1Gbit burstable fiber optic solution was cost prohibitive.

SEDA-COG and MCDIC then reached out to other Partnership for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) organizations, including the Innovative Manufacturers Center (IMC) and PennTAP for help. PennTAP provided an Internet assessment of FOXPRO's situation and IMC Business Advisor Dana Gordon used the results of the assessment to develop and submit a Broadband Technical Assistance Mini Grant Program application to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) requesting funds to help offset the cost of the improvement.

DCED approved IMC's grant application on behalf of FOXPRO and provided the company with more than \$9,000 toward the effort. IMC also committed \$2000 in project funds.

In the fall of 2015, Nittany Media successfully installed and began providing service for an 11,585 foot-long, 1Gbit fiber optic line, which is burstable to 1000 Mbps, for FOXPRO.

RESULTS

As a result of the increased bandwidth:

- FOXPRO's IT department no longer receives complaints about employees being unable to do their jobs due to lack of Internet access and employee productivity has increased.
- The company has experienced a decrease in the number of lost calls - calls employees previously had not been able to answer quickly enough before customers grew weary of waiting and ended their calls.
- The improved voice and data connection will allow FOXPRO to move forward with plans to implement an automated voice-services system for customer calls that will help the company reduce costs.
- FOXPRO is now able to provide faster online credit card approvals for customers, thereby significantly reducing lost and aborted transactions.
- The company can now download and preview short clips of video content rather than having to wait for the download of much larger, complete files and is able to share more of its video on YouTube and other social media sites.
- The company has been able to retain and begin to grow its customer base. FOXPRO anticipates a modest annual increase in sales of \$140K and estimates retained sales of \$500,000.
- In the next 12 months, the company projects a cost savings of \$50,000, the retention of two jobs and the creation of two additional positions.
- FOXPRO's online banking functions, access to external servers and interactions with its shipping partner are no longer held hostage to insufficient bandwidth.

“In general, everyone has increased their personal productivity,” said Nathan Smith, FOXPRO’s Director of Information Technology. “We no longer get complaints about the internet speed.”

Due to the success of this project, IMC has replicated this model for another small company in an adjacent county and is actively searching for companies that have a need for the same solution.