

County in Texas Deploys Video Solutions to Enhance Judicial Processes



Dallas County installs more than 200 Cisco TelePresence endpoints to enhance public safety and create new efficiencies.

Executive Summary

Dallas County

- **Industry:** Local Government
- **Location:** Texas
- **Number of End Points:** More than 200

CHALLENGE

- Streamline operations for the courts
- Maximize time and enhance productivity
- Help ensure all activities are aligned with state's Fair Defense Act

SOLUTION

- Upgraded network foundation to support video applications
- Installed 200 video endpoints for remote appearances
- Deployed video in remote locations to limit travel

RESULTS

- Reduced costs for prisoner transport and other travel expenses
- Enhanced public safety by minimizing need to transport prisoners
- Streamlined judicial process and uncovered new efficiencies

Challenge

Dallas County is located in the northwest portion of Texas and covers 880 square miles. Its county seat is Dallas, which is the largest city in the county, the third-largest city in Texas, and the eighth-largest city in the United States. As of the 2010 census, the county had an official population of 2,368,139, and is the ninth most populous county in the United States.

Dallas County operates the largest public defender office in the state. The office has 94 lawyers, who try more than 45,000 cases annually. The majority of the cases are in the adult criminal courts, but the Assistant Public Defenders are also appointed to represent clients in the family and juvenile courts.

For anyone who is accused or for all who are accused, Texas' Fair Defense Act requires lawyers to communicate with clients within 24 hours of being appointed. However, with lawyers' large workloads, this requirement was difficult to meet.

Arresting individuals who live in suburbs was also becoming a challenge to the courts. The court is required to arraign these individuals within a certain time period, which proved difficult due to the workload and the distance from the jail. In addition, a concern arose throughout the county about the manner in which prisoners had to be transported. Prisoners are required to have a minimum of two officers with them at all times, which takes police officers off the streets and is very costly.

To streamline the processes, enhance productivity, and lower costs, the county began evaluating technology solutions that would help enable a more effective work environment.

Solution

The technology solutions under evaluation included a video solution. Initially, Wayne Henderson, the county's network/server manager, was not in favor of deploying a video application due to concerns about bandwidth. However, at the same time, Dallas County was upgrading its network to ensure that no bandwidth issues would arise and to provide the IT team with the ability to weight-limit the amount of bandwidth used by video. "Since the network upgrade, there have not been any bandwidth issues. It has been a great success. The equipment has been extremely reliable," says Henderson.

To serve as an initial proof-of-concept, the county installed Cisco TelePresence® equipment at the Dallas County Jail. The system was first used to rearraign prisoners in the jail. The county then used the video system to communicate with the Justice of the Peace Courts and the Dallas County Community Supervision office and moved on to doing arraignments in the suburbs.

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Judge Terrie McVea, Chief Magistrate,
Dallas County Court System

The use of Cisco® technologies within the courts, law enforcement, and corrections fields is known as Cisco Connected Justice™. Connected Justice streamlines the state and local judicial process from arraignment and trial to incarceration and parole. Via a Cisco unified network, the technology enables the flow of information, enhances operational efficiencies and productivity, increases mobility, reduces costs, and improves overall public safety.

Dallas County deployed 200 Cisco TelePresence endpoints at sites at the Dallas County Jail, courthouses, Juvenile Justice Center, Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department, attorney offices, and other sites across the county. At the jail, the video units are installed in a large glass window to separate the prisoner from the technology. The units are also placed in closed booths that are locked and secure.

Since the initial Cisco TelePresence deployment, the county has installed upgrades for the units, but continues to use TelePresence at all sites. At remote sites, the county uses Cisco TelePresence 150 MXP and E20s. Additionally, the team purchased several Codec 3000 MXP units to allow the video technology to move between courts as needed and to be used for hearings, out-of-state testimonies, and plea agreements when a prisoner is in another jurisdiction. In the prosecutor’s office, the IT team installed E20s and Cisco Jabber Video™, previously called Movi. Cisco Jabber Video software may be licensed and deployed on a network to extend video communications to a mobile workforce.

The county recently installed two 55-inch Cisco monitors in the conference rooms so that personnel can conduct video conferences with remote vendors. These units have been helpful for sharing presentations. “One thing that we pushed for was introducing video technology to each core building to limit the travel required,” says Henderson.

The juvenile courts received a grant to install video equipment at the Henry Wade Juvenile Justice Center to enable remote hearings with children and to help avoid persons involved in the case from having to drive to Dallas. This network runs across the states and is also used for handling foster placements.

The County Homeland Security team used grant funding to tie into the county’s video network to allow them to communicate with other organizations and departments. Now, not only can they reach out to entities outside of the county, but they can also use the internal network to enhance public safety.

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Product List

Video

- TelePresence
- Movi
- E20s
- Cisco Monitors

Results

“With the video solution, the sky is the limit,” says Judge Terrie McVea, chief magistrate, Dallas County Court System. “Everything is positive. I see no downside. There is no end to what you can do with this technology. It is easy to use, and it is very intuitive. It is reliable. It is rare that we have any technical issues and, when we do, we just need to reboot the system. It is perfect equipment in my opinion.”

Attorneys and incarcerated inmates have greatly benefitted from the video system. The county has had to expand the number of video systems because the private defense bar requested the technology as well. This expansion eliminates the need for attorneys to travel to the jail, where they often wait almost a full day to speak with their clients, greatly improving the attorney’s productivity.

“I use the video systems at least a couple of times during the week to speak to my staff in other offices. I have staff in at least three remote locations, and the video system allows me to bring us all together. It saves us time and enhances our communication,” says Lynn Richardson, chief public defender, Dallas County.

The video system helps the justice process run more smoothly and efficiently. It benefits all departments and organizations that are using it in a unique way. It helps the Dallas County Sheriff’s Office because the office no longer has to use its manpower to transport inmates. The system helps inmates because they can speak with their attorneys more regularly. It helps attorneys because they can be more productive since they no longer have to wait at the jail all day to talk to a client. It additionally helps judges because they can communicate with ease and bring in expert witnesses as needed.

“We had a Dallas detective testify at a trial in Michigan over video rather than having him fly out of state,” says Judge McVea, as an example of how the county courts use the technology. “This helped the police department save money, allowed the detective to continue to work on his cases in Dallas, and he was still able to share insight on the trial in Michigan.”

Today, Dallas County courts try to be very careful when ordering competency hearings because they are extremely expensive. Because of the video system, mental health case workers can use video technology to speak with a client and make a preliminary assessment as to whether they actually need a competency hearing. This capability helps keep the costs down while ensuring that the inmate is given the necessary treatment.

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Another project currently being developed in the county is for private attorneys to be able to contact their clients in jail from their offices rather than traveling to the courthouse. The impetus for this project was spurred by the attorneys' demand for even more access to video technology to enable communications outside of working hours. The District Attorney's Office is also looking to conduct grand jury testimony via video technology. This capability would eliminate the need to take police officers away from street duty to come to court to testify.

Dallas County is leading the way with video technology by establishing a video network that connects more people than ever before. The county is also enabling inter-county and city videoconferencing across the state of Texas to limit travel for all parties.

Next Steps

Dallas County is currently considering incorporating telemedicine as part of its partnership with Parkland Hospital. The county is trying to prevent having to transport prisoners in the chemical dependency unit to the hospital to save money and time and to enhance public safety. The hospital will also be equipped with a few video units for arraignments of people who are injured or sick and cannot be brought to jail right away. The county wants to ensure that their rights are preserved.

For More Information

To find out more about the Cisco Connected Justice, go to:
<http://www.cisco.com/go/connectedjustice>.

To find out more about the Cisco video solutions, go to:
<http://www.cisco.com/go/video>.

