

Customer Stories:

Progressive Tractor
& Implement



Progressive
Tractor & Implement
grows its business,

helps farmers
grow theirs

- **Business Needs** - Progressive Tractor and Implement Co. (PTI) became a leading farm equipment dealer on the strength of its outstanding customer service. To further exceed customers' expectations, the company needed a fast, reliable way for people with a question or problem to reach its technicians and parts clerks
- **Networking Solution** - AT&T CollaborateSM lets customers dial one number to reach the service person they need, whether they're in the office or out on a farm call
- **Business Value** - The solution supports PTI's commitment to customer care by helping to ensure staff are responsive to every caller, every time. It also helps PTI employees work together more effectively
- **Industry Focus** - Farm equipment
- **Size** - 15 locations throughout Louisiana and South Arkansas

About Progressive Tractor & Implement

Progressive Tractor & Implement (PTI), a Case IH, Kubota and Wacker Neuson dealership, has built a loyal customer base in Louisiana and Southeast Arkansas by selling high quality new and used agricultural equipment. The company specializes in high horsepower four-wheel drive, row crop, utility, and compact tractors, along with irrigation units and harvesting equipment, such as combines, cotton pickers, and sugar cane harvesters. The firm employs 300 people who work at 14 retail locations and one distribution center.

The situation

Customer service has always been the hallmark of PTI, distinguishing it from dozens of other farm equipment dealers operating in the same territory. As part of the owners' efforts to keep customers satisfied, the company needed to be sure its technicians and other staff were always available. The nature of their work, however, means PTI employees are often in the field – literally – responding to farm calls. When it's time to plow, seed, fertilize, or harvest, farmers can't afford to waste a day or even

a few hours because of an equipment problem. PTI needed a fast, reliable way for customers to connect with the person who can best help them.

Solution

AT&T CollaborateSM gives PTI a flexible hosted solution that includes traditional voice features and the collaboration tools that staff members require. Customers can dial one number to reach the PTI technician they need, whether they're working in the office or out in the community. The solution supports PTI's commitment to customer service by helping to ensure staff members are responsive to every caller, every time.



Cultivating connections with customers

Long-term employees Thomas Soileau, Eddie Villemarette and O'Neal Higginbotham acquired PTI in 2006 with a revolutionary idea. Beyond providing farmers with the best possible equipment, they also wanted to deliver superior customer service after the sale, a commodity they believed was in short supply. Over the years, their reliability, consistency, fairness, and focus on satisfying every customer have enabled PTI to grow steadily.

The Louisiana-based company offers the most advanced equipment, backed with attractive financial solutions designed to get farmers into equipment and into the field quickly, said Paula K. Manuel, Progressive Tractor's IT specialist. As a result, it has become the largest Case IH in Louisiana and the third largest, privately owned CASE IH Dealer in North America.

"Our clients are mainly farmers and ranchers, and we offer them the best," Manuel said. The company sells numerous allied lines of equipment and rents agricultural machinery such as headers and combines, tractors, cutters, and dirt scrapers. Additionally, they offer support to mining and construction sites, and even cater to individuals who are not in the ag industry by selling lawn and garden equipment for home use.

Stimulating farm productivity

While farming is an ancient art, the equipment that farmers rely on today has become increasingly sophisticated according to Manuel. "Tractors have computers now to support the latest in advanced

precision farming, which has become a really big deal,” she said. Precision farming makes use of technology to improve the growing of crops and raising livestock, thereby helping farmers realize maximum returns.

“Some of this equipment can plot the land and take soil samples to tell farmers which areas need fertilizer or other soil additions,” she added. “And then they can program it to distribute that fertilizer according to the information it’s gathered to help them get more out of their fields and increase their yield.” Manuel said she was initially skeptical about some farmers’ acceptance of hi-tech agriculture. “I thought the old farmers would not want this, but it turns out they really do, because they want to see a big crop come in,” she said. “And the young guys are all over it, of course.”

Building advanced technology into farm equipment has created a need for more specialized customer service. “Keeping up with the technology that they keep introducing into the agricultural industry makes it a challenge to improve efficiencies and response times,” Manuel said, adding that this creates a customer service challenge for PTI, since farmers usually don’t have time to run to town to have the tractor’s computer serviced, or even to replace something simple like a broken belt. “If farmers are not in the field, they’re losing time,” she said. “We want them to be able to get on the phone, order the part, and we’ll deliver it to them.”

PTI wanted to be sure that someone was always available to answer customers’ calls, but the nature of their business meant service technicians were often out of the office. In this case, calls were routed to another office, Manuel said, where the person who answered the phone had to try to find the person



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the caller needed. To provide the best possible service, the company needed a better way to connect customers quickly with the salesperson, technician or other employee who could best help them.

Customer calls are answered

After considering several possibilities, PTI chose AT&T CollaborateSM to enable customers to easily reach any PTI employee, even after hours or on the weekend. The hosted voice and collaboration services further enhances PTI’s excellent customer care and improves the productivity of its busy staff. Collaborate delivers the traditional voice and collaboration tools employees need, whether they’re in the office, a vehicle, or a customer’s field.

AT&T CollaborateSM supports the vision of PTI's founders by helping to ensure that virtually every call is answered swiftly. "Our company has earned a reputation for being very, very dedicated to customer service," Manuel said. "When customers call, our employees make every effort to answer their questions, repair their equipment or get them the part they need." Because of this promise, Soileau and Villemarette insist that customers be able to talk with a person when they call. "They do not want automation responding to these farmers," Manuel said. "They want a person on the other end of the line answering questions."

But because PTI is a lean operation, there are very few people at each worksite. "The majority are technicians, mechanics and service people, because Eddie's and Thomas' deal is quality service," she said. "They don't waste money on people just to answer the phone, so when the main line rings, typically every phone in the place rings, because someone has to answer the phone. If you call our places, your call will usually be answered by the second ring, even at the time of year when things get really wild."

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Improved responsiveness and accessibility

Manuel said PTI employees appreciate that their colleagues and customers can find them easily, thanks to Collaborate. "We're definitely more accessible now. If the person they call doesn't answer, the call is automatically forwarded to the employee's cell phone," she said. "And if they're on their cell phone, then voicemail will take a message. We want our callers to hear our employees' voices, at least."

Manuel said Collaborate has made life easier for everyone in the office. "They love it because they're not tracking down people like they used to," she said.

The solution also helps Manuel provide IT assistance to her PTI colleagues. She is the sole IT person for the whole corporation, supporting their land line and cell phones, wiring, computers, printers, software, security, and any IT problems that arise. "My customers are our employees, and now they can just dial one number," she said. "It doesn't matter where I am – the call is going to find me."

The company has deployed Collaborate at 6 sites so far and is working to turn it up at all the rest of its locations. "They'll all be able to dial anyone in the company directly," she said. "I love that feature. I don't want to talk to more people than I have to; I want to talk to the person I need, and if that number doesn't answer, I know the call will follow them and ring to their cell phones. It just makes it easier to reach people."

Soileau and Villemarette are pleased with the solution's ability to connect customers with the help they need,

but they continue to check staff's responsiveness daily. "They want to be sure that we're answering the phones. I can't emphasize that enough," Manuel said. "I think they call every store, every day, just to see how many rings it takes to reach someone."

Supporting productivity and core values

To support its need for dependable connectivity, PTI also chose AT&T Dedicated Internet Service, which supplies high-speed access to support critical operations. These include email, productivity applications, and remote access, which helps Manuel diagnose and repair IT problems at the company's far-flung office sites.

"I love to get on the road and visit other locations, but unfortunately drive time is not time I can be productive, and some of these stores are 4 hours away," she said. "I can spend an entire workday on the road going and coming. So, I try my best to support our staff by remoting into their computers or walking them through a process over the phone."

Both Collaborate and Dedicated Internet Service support PTI's core business – and its core values – by enhancing the staff's ability to keep the customers happy. "I think we chose AT&T because it's large enough to support a company of PTI's size," she said. The company also offered a good deal when PTI bought Collaborate and Dedicated Internet Service together. "It's better to have one vendor and not a dozen, so we don't have to try to remember who's our provider for every service. That was an appealing option," she said. "And of course, the more services we could combine the better price we could get. AT&T has a lot of good things to offer."

