

It's business as usual for The SSI Group despite COVID-19 disruptions thanks to prudent investments in

# advanced AT&T voice and networking platforms

- **Business needs** - Enhanced ability to improve financial outcomes for healthcare clients.
- **Networking solution** - AT&T voice, networking, and internet services enabled SSI staff to continue to fulfill the company's commitment to clients when the COVID-19 pandemic closed many businesses.
- **Business value** - Business continuity and outstanding customer care.
- **Industry focus** - Financial performance solutions for healthcare organizations
- **Size** - 1,200+ healthcare provider and payer clients

## About The SSI Group

The SSI Group (SSI) is a leader in revenue cycle performance solutions. The company partners with health systems and health plans to optimize revenue, reduce costs, and increase visibility into enterprise operations. Its people-first, proven solutions for the revenue cycle, claims management, and analytics provide clients with the foundation necessary for financial health while allowing them the flexibility to adapt to industry changes and requirements.

## The situation

SSI is a client-centric organization. It has over 1,200 provider clients that rely on them for patient access, billing, payment, and analytics solutions. Working closely with clients to establish benchmarks and goals based on industry standards, SSI understands the impact that timely and accurate claim processing has on the financial health of their clients. As part of its drive to exceed client expectations, SSI wanted to create a unified interaction management solution. Such a solution would increase the efficiency of staff and further enhance SSI's legendary customer care. At the same time, officials were looking to upgrade the wide area network (WAN) that connected its offices from Alabama to Oregon. For their WAN, they wanted a highly secure, private, and scalable solution that offered the performance and speed needed.

## Solution

A 20-year relationship with AT&T Business led SSI to explore new AT&T voice and networking technology. SSI chose an AT&T Business-hosted voice platform to enhance its call center effectiveness and an AT&T Virtual Private Network (AT&T VPN) infrastructure to deliver managed bandwidth and provide strong network-based security for its voice, chat, and call center traffic. Combined with AT&T Dedicated Internet service, the solutions enabled SSI's nearly 400 professionals to work from home when the government issued COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders.



## A people-driven company

The SSI Group drives the revenue cycle between payers and providers to improve financial outcomes for healthcare organizations. Its solutions, knowledge,

and relationships have expanded over the company's 33-year history, but its commitment to clients has remained its bedrock since day one. It remains a fiercely independent organization dedicated to easing the challenges of healthcare professionals.

The company differentiates itself in the marketplace by delivering a personalized experience for clients. "We have a large percentage of people who have built relationships with clients over many years," said Heidi Kemp, Vice President of Marketing for SSI. "We partner with our clients and collaborate to solve their business problems."

Brian DeWeese, Vice President of Client Services, believes clients respond to this approach, and he showcases the company's call center as an excellent example. "We have no hold time," he said. "It's zero. So when we say, 'We're here to partner and help provide a great service to the client', we mean it. We have a great product and even greater people."

Clients and employees are loyal to SSI; the average length of service for SSI's support managers is 16 years. "I think the tenure of the people that have been at SSI is a testament to the fact that it's a great place to work, and the length of time we've had many of our clients is a testament to the type of service and support that we provide them," DeWeese said. "It's definitely a people-driven company."

Diana Allen, Ph.D., recently became CEO of The SSI Group. "I've been with the company since December, and the folks here have really drawn me in," she said. "It's all about their work family, and they're very collaborative and supportive with each other. That carries over into our service level as well."

## Intentional innovation to solve clients' problems

Its intense focus on clients has led SSI to invest in the people, processes, and technology it needs to serve them. Innovation has helped SSI thrive in the highly regulated healthcare space. "With COVID-19 the rules and regulations are changing every single day," Dr. Allen says. "We've had to be extremely nimble and agile in our content delivery. As healthcare becomes more regulated, we have to evolve and advance our technology."



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Vice President of Client Services, The SSI Group

Increasing regulations and tighter reimbursements have spurred many organizations to revise their processes. "We have to do more with less, so we've had to rely more on technology," she says. "We have to deliver more to our clients in a space where declining reimbursements mean they can't necessarily pay a whole lot more. It's a challenge."

Andy Childs, Vice President of Information Technology, said the company has evolved its infrastructure to meet the changing needs of clients and staff. "We're people-centric," he said. "As the needs of our clients have arisen, we've used new technologies and new ways of doing things to solve problems."

## A timely technology investment

SSI became an AT&T Business customer decades ago, beginning with internet services. "Over the years, we've learned that AT&T is more than just an internet service provider," Childs said. "Relying on the technology and our relationship with AT&T Business has allowed us to grow."

Officials decided to upgrade the company's premises-based voice services after it acquired locations in Nashville, Dallas, and Portland. "We realized we needed a larger presence and we knew that AT&T Business could provide that for us," Childs said. "We also realized that we do not need to be in the business of voice—we need to be in the business of healthcare and providing solutions to our clients."

After reviewing several possibilities, SSI chose Webex Calling Enterprise with AT&T (formerly known as Cisco Hosted Collaboration Solution from AT&T), a suite of unified communications services that are supported and managed in the AT&T Business cloud. They also

chose AT&T Virtual Private Network (AT&T VPN) to give staff highly secure network access to communications and applications, regardless of where they were working. Over the course of this past year, the company migrated its existing call center solution to AT&T and increased its AT&T VPN bandwidth to manage throughput with the new call center platform and features. “The AT&T Virtual Private Network allowed us to have that communication across the nation with our remote offices,” Childs said. “It also provided a layer of security because it’s a networked-based VPN, and we’re not transmitting voice and data over the public internet.”

The company completed the migration in February, just weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic would force many businesses to close. SSI’s investment in the cloud-based platform from AT&T Business enabled it to continue operations when many other companies could not. Its 380 employees, including 80 call center agents, were able to work from home as easily and productively as if they were still at the office.

## Keeping the phones ringing

It was just weeks after Dr. Allen became SSI CEO that the coronavirus began spreading in the U.S. She was impressed with the way her staff enabled the company to continue operations, especially since the scale of the network deployment was unlike anything the company had ever undergone.

“Once we made the decision to go remote, we were able to move everyone quickly,” she said. “And we did this across all five of our offices. We managed to equip just under 400 employees with laptops, provide them access to the system, and get our call center running remotely. And everyone was out of all our offices within three and a half days.”

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DeWeese said his team used a phased approach in moving the company’s workforce to their homes, starting with just a few staff working from home the first day and adding more over the next 2 days. While he was confident in the technology and employees’ abilities, he admits to a few qualms: “I was confident but nervous. There were some sleepless nights when I wondered whether we were going to be able to pull this off.”

There was a lot at stake, he acknowledged. “The one thing we couldn’t afford is for our phones to quit ringing,” he said. “The clients have to be able to get in touch with us. There was a lot of testing involved between our group and the technical team from AT&T Business to make sure that everything was working.” The solution Webex Calling Enterprise with AT&T had passed the test.

DeWeese had promised Dr. Allen that the call center migration would be complete by the following Monday. Four days before the Monday deadline, however, DeWeese had news to report. “I was able to walk into her office midday the Thursday before that Monday and say, ‘We’re done,’” he said. “It was as painless as this process could be. The fact that we moved to a completely remote platform for our call center in three days is a testament to the collaboration between SSI and AT&T Business.”

## Business as usual

Dr. Allen sees business continuity as the top benefit of the company's network upgrades. "We were able to go remote and keep our business running virtually seamlessly. It was business as usual," she said. "And it was completely transparent to our clients. We were meeting their needs as though we were in the office."

Kemp noted that the company did not inform clients about its new work plan. "We didn't even specifically message them that we were going remote, because the goal was to make it virtually seamless," she said. "And we haven't had any support escalations or complaints."



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"It's completely invisible to them," DeWeese said. "They call, we answer the phone, we address their issue. It's as if nothing has changed."

DeWeese appreciates the ease of the AT&T deployments. "The implementation was way beyond anything I expected from an ease-of-use standpoint," he said. "I hate to use the word 'seamless' because nothing's really seamless, but it was about as close to seamless as it could be. It was an absolutely fun and enjoyable process to go through."

Officials expect that SSI's investments in AT&T Business technology will enable the company to support its clients throughout the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. "We're just making sure that our staff stays safe and that we continue business as usual," Dr. Allen said. "It's going to be a challenging time even when we all go back to work in a more normal environment, so we're going to work harder and partner more than we ever have before to help everyone in the healthcare space recover as quickly as possible."