

# SOLUTIONS

## FOR BUSINESS



### Get Your Questions Answered at the Solutions Technology Experience Center

*Curt Thornberry, Technology Development Director*



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# SOLUTIONS FOR BUSINESS

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**Welcome** to the first issue of *Solutions for Business*. Panora Telco and Guthrie Center Communications created this quarterly publication to provide valuable information to our business customers. You can expect each issue to cover topics that affect your company and provide examples of how our communications services can be a part of your success and growth.

**Does Your Business Have a Technology Plan?** It's an essential question to ask. On page 3, we share reasons why such a plan can be beneficial and how to get started developing one.

On pages 4 and 5, we take you inside our **Solutions Technology Experience Center** in downtown Panora. Open about a year, it's a place to test drive devices, get your technology questions answered, and learn how Solutions can support your business. If you haven't stopped by yet, I invite you to do so soon.

As you may have experienced, **Call Completion Problems Disrupt Business**. Known as "rural call completion," this issue has been around for years, and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is taking a multi-pronged approach to addressing it. We explore why it's happening and what you can do about it on page 6. Then on page 7, pick up **Sound Strategies for Email Management** and get to know **Curt Thornberry**, Technology Development Director, a little better.

*Solutions* is more than the name of this magazine. It's what we provide daily to the businesses we serve. Let us know what challenges we can help solve for you.



Sincerely,

Andrew M. Randol  
 General Manager  
 Panora Telco & Guthrie Center Communications



PANORA TELCO



# Does Your Business Have a **Technology Plan?**



**Think strategically about hardware, software, and technical support**

A technology plan is similar to a business plan, financial plan, or human resources plan, in that it helps you tie a specific area of your business to overall business goals. A technology plan can help you think about the future, allowing you to prepare for your company's upcoming needs and grow as technology changes over time. Your company needs a technology plan, no matter its size or offerings, and whether or not it specializes in technology.

## **Benefits of a Technology Plan**

With a technology plan, your company can proactively adapt to, and keep up with, technological advances, which is beneficial in a number of ways:

- You'll be more likely to meet technology goals if you have them. A technology plan is where you can record such goals and track their progress.
- Your business will have the right equipment to meet new customer demands.
- You'll be ahead of the technology curve, signaling to customers that you're competent in other areas of your business as well.
- You'll have a budget for purchasing new technology so these expenses won't come as a surprise and throw off your finances.
- Your business may attract younger workers to whom up-to-date technology is not just an added bonus, but expected.
- You may save money. By not planning ahead, you risk having technology that becomes obsolete and needs to be replaced every few years. Thinking ahead and investing in better equipment can also result in fewer problems and less time and money needed to deal with them.

## **How to Get Started**

The first step in building a technology plan is to assess your company's current technology. Ask for feedback from both customers and employees to see what needs to be improved. Look for areas of your business that could use more technology to make the work more efficient. Also, look for places where you may have technology that you don't need (for example, printers in a paperless office).

Next, think about what you want to accomplish in your business and how technology can help. Set goals accordingly. Make sure to consider the feasibility of the goals, including how much time and money it will take to complete each one. Consider what technology might be needed if your company grows and how technology may change over time.

After you create the plan, it's time to start implementation. Don't forget to revisit and revise it each year.

*Technology plans help businesses reach their goals. For more information about how we can help meet your technology needs, call Panora Telco at (641) 755-2424 or Guthrie Center Communications at (641) 332-2000.*



# Solutions Technology Experience Center

It's where to go for help comparing, selecting, and using technology

The Solutions Technology Experience Center opened on Panora's Main Street in December 2014 with this goal—to provide a place to test drive a variety of tech options, ask questions, and get solutions to your challenges.

You don't need to be a customer of Panora Telco or Guthrie Center Communications to take advantage of the many resources offered at Solutions. They're available to anyone looking for technology information and hands-on experiences.

## A Friend in the Business

Curt Thornberry, Technology Development Director for Solutions, says, "No matter how much a person knows about technology, there's always more to understand. Things change all the time. We want Solutions to be your knowledgeable friend in the technology business."

For more than 10 years, the staff of Solutions has supported area businesses of all sizes—no business is too big or too small. To better meet their needs moving forward, a survey was conducted. Explains Thornberry, "Over the past 18 months, Panora Telco and Guthrie Center Communications hosted roundtable discussions and distributed questionnaires to our business customers. One thing they kept asking for was practical information on how to use technology to run their businesses more efficiently."

He adds, "Typically, these businesses worked with out-of-state companies for at least some segment of their technology

support. What we heard from them is that it would be nice to have an accessible local provider to go to when they had questions. Instead of playing telephone tag, they liked the idea of being able to go down the street and talk to someone face to face."

## Check Out Devices and Get Answers

What will you find when you walk into Solutions? According to Thornberry, you'll find an environment that's very different from those big-box technology stores. "The experience that people have when they visit those chain stores is not always positive. It can be frustrating and overwhelming. Solutions is unique. While we sell a variety of devices, Solutions is not primarily a retail store. It's much more a place for people to get technology education, information, and answers. You can do some research and weed out misinformation. You can also try out and compare products in the store before you buy."

### The product selection available at Solutions includes:

- Notebooks and tablets
- Desktop PCs
- PC displays/monitors
- Servers

- Routers and switches
- High-definition TV sets, cables, and accessories
- Presentation devices such as Google Chromecast and Apple TV
- Smart Business sensors, controllers, and IP surveillance cameras

“Everything is set up to make shopping for, and using, new devices simple for the customer. For example, Solutions has an area just for tablets—iPad, Android, and Windows models—in different sizes. You can use them and explore their features at your own pace. Plus, you can ask as many questions as you want,” Thornberry notes. Visitors will find the same type of displays for other product categories such as computers, servers, and TV equipment.

“We want to smooth out the process and make it more enjoyable. When you run a business, you just want technology to work and do what you need it to do. Our aim is to make that happen as easily as possible,” says Thornberry.

### A Well-Trained Team

At Solutions to help you are specially trained employees of Panora Telco and Guthrie Center Communications. Says Thornberry, “I’m almost always at Solutions, but I’m not there alone. Working with me are a variety of our technical and customer service people, each with expertise in certain areas. They all know how to do common tasks like program a tablet and set up a Windows PC. That way, they’re familiar with the process and can explain it more clearly to a customer.”



***When you run a business, you just want technology to work and do what you need it to do. Our aim is to make that happen as easily as possible.”***

—CURT THORNBERRY, TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, SOLUTIONS

When asked for the most frequent comment he hears about Solutions, Thornberry replies, “People say to me, ‘I didn’t know you were here!’ Although we’ve tried to spread the word, I guess it hasn’t gotten around to everyone yet.”

Now that you know about Solutions, we encourage you to visit. It’s located at 112 East Main Street in Panora, next to the Panora Telco office. Solutions is open Monday through Friday from 9 am – 5 pm.



### TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TECHNOLOGY TRAINING

Solutions provides a variety of technology training opportunities to meet the needs of businesses.

Curt Thornberry, Technology Development Director for Solutions, notes, “In 2015, we provided software training to staff at area businesses, which included Microsoft Office instruction to help smooth out the process of migration. The Microsoft Office training is done in three sessions of 1.5 hours each and has been very popular with businesses.”

Solutions also offers Word, Excel, and Outlook classes. In addition, there’s a Social Media for Businesses class to teach businesses how to set up accounts and engage customers with social media. In February 2016, Solutions will be moderating round-table discussions regarding business technologies with small business owners and entrepreneurs at a regional business workshop.

*To learn more about training opportunities from Solutions, call (641) 755-2600.*

# Call Completion

## Problems Disrupt Business

Long distance calling to rural areas is a nationwide issue



**R**ecently, Panora Telco and Guthrie Center Communications have been hearing from customers that some calls made to them are not completed. In these cases, the caller hears the phone ringing repeatedly, but the business is completely unaware that a call is coming in. In other instances, they're receiving calls with no sound (dead air), or poor sound quality or echoing.

### Why Calls Aren't Completed

This issue is a national problem caused by the way many long distance providers route calls to rural providers. It's particularly troublesome for businesses that rely on customers' ability to contact them to initiate sales. If the problem was within the Panora Telco or Guthrie Center Communications network, we could take steps to fix it.

However, the problem starts with the long distance carrier used by the person placing the call. These carriers are charged access rates when they transfer calls into rural areas. When they set up their systems to find the cheapest routes to complete the calls—known as “least cost routes”—the calls can end up in a loop between offices, instead of being routed to the call recipient. The carriers are charged fines when this happens, but this isn't enough to deter them.

We are making every effort to work with our national and state telecommunications associations and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to resolve this issue. The FCC has created a special task force

to investigate and address it, and we remain hopeful that they will act quickly to resolve these problems. Visit the FCC's website for more information on their efforts: <http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/problems-long-distance-or-wireless-calling-rural-areas>

### What Can You Do?

If someone trying to call you experiences any issues with completing the call or hears poor call quality, we encourage you to contact your Customer Service Specialist and report the following details:

- The long-distance carrier used by the person trying to reach you. We need to know the name of the carrier used by the caller so that we can contact the carrier on your behalf to try and resolve the issue.
- The time that call was placed and phone number from which the call originated.
- Go to [www.fcc.gov/complaints](http://www.fcc.gov/complaints) to file an informal wired telephone service complaint with the FCC against the carrier used by the person trying to call you.

While the issues are not with Panora Telco or Guthrie Center Communications facilities, our commitment to customers remains the same. We will continue to do everything in our power to provide premium service and to ensure that outside carriers meet their responsibility to deliver calls to our network so we can, in turn, deliver those calls to you.

# Sound Strategies for Email Management

When you're getting buried in emails each day, it may seem like the impossible dream to keep up with all the filing, deleting, forwarding, and responding. You know you should reply to that customer's request or that supplier's question, but you can't seem to find the time.



A good place to start is by studying what's typically found in your inbox. If there are hundreds (or thousands) of emails in your inbox right now, you could have a systems issue that needs to be addressed. Consider the following strategies:

- Take a closer look at your spam filter. Does it need to be upgraded or the settings changed?
- Are there newsletters you receive regularly that are no longer of value to you? Unsubscribe to them.
- Are you being copied in on communications unnecessarily? Be clear with colleagues about which projects require emails to be sent to you and which do not.
- Do you lack an effective system for processing emails or fail to designate adequate time for email management?

Your approach to dealing with each email is also vitally important. Efficiency experts generally recommend you check emails periodically, but not constantly, during the workday. Scan them quickly to determine which are most urgent/important, then read them in order of priority. The goal is to read each email once and act on it—either by replying, filing, or deleting. If you can't immediately act on a particular email, set up a to-do task and schedule a time that you are going to complete this task.

The bottom line is this: Don't let email reduce your productivity. Instead, manage it more carefully so that you have the time to effectively communicate with those people most critical to the success of your business.



## WHO'S MINDING YOUR BUSINESS?

**Curt Thornberry**  
Technology Development Director

Since December 2004, Curt Thornberry has led the technology journey for Panora Communications Cooperative, which now includes Panora Telco, Guthrie Center Communications, and Solutions Technology Experience Center. He brought with him professional background and training in information technology, higher education, and network management.

In his position as Technology Development Director, Thornberry is responsible for the deployment and support of advanced networks including IP video, fixed wireless, and fiber. He also manages multiple small business network environments and engages technology end-users through hands-on training, technical briefs, peer education, roundtable discussions, and workshops. In addition, Thornberry develops marketing and branding strategies that engage consumers with communications and broadband technologies in both cooperative and competitive environments.

What does Thornberry like most about his position? He answers, "There's a great deal of variety, and I'm always learning something new."

Thornberry is married with two adult kids, four cats, and three dogs. He enjoys running, biking, paddling, playing soccer, gardening—and being able to walk to work.



# STEP INSIDE FOR **SOLUTIONS** TO YOUR BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGES

**Our Solutions Technology Experience Center offers all this in downtown Panora:**

- Get your questions answered and problems solved by technical experts.
- Test drive a variety of devices to help you select what's right for you.
- Purchase computers, tablets, monitors, routers, servers, IP surveillance cameras, and more.
- Expand your knowledge by taking technology classes.

Call (641) 755-2600 to get a  
**FREE Tech Assessment!**



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