

# SOLUTIONS

FOR BUSINESS



## Healthy Progress at Guthrie County Hospital and Clinics

  
PANORA TELCO

 **Guthrie Center**  
communications

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**In health care, there’s a diagnosis followed by a treatment plan.** One could argue that the same basic process takes place in most workplaces — we have to identify problems and then develop solutions in order to maintain a healthy bottom line.

Health care is featured in this issue of *Solutions for Business*, due to the **Business Spotlight on Guthrie County Hospital and Clinics** on pages 4 and 5. As more aspects of patient care demand bandwidth, including the transmission of electronic health records and medical imaging, more bandwidth is required. Panora Telco and Guthrie Center Communications provide TLAN service to meet the growing bandwidth needs of these facilities. **Andy Carson**, Combination Technician, participated in this TLAN project and is the topic of the employee profile on page 5.

**Are You Checking Your Email Too Often ?** Check out page 3 to learn the prescription for this common affliction. Then turn to page 6 to learn **How to Stop the Rumor Mill**, since gossiping is usually not a healthy habit in the business world. On page 7, we share **7 Steps for Dealing with Difficult Customers**. These situations can be challenging, but handled correctly, you can end up with happier customers and a more successful business.

Panora Telco and Guthrie Center Communications are always available to give your business a technology “check up” and recommend a plan to meet your changing communications needs. Contact us when you’re ready to get started.



Sincerely,

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



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# Are You Checking Your Email Too Often?

During a typical workday, how many times do you check your email? Is it once every hour or two? Or is it more like every five minutes? You may think checking your inbox frequently throughout the day and sending replies within minutes makes you highly productive. Actually, the opposite is probably true; you're slowing yourself down and preventing the kind of focus required for optimal productivity.



Successful inbox management starts with adjusting your attitude. Even though email may feel urgent, most of the time it isn't. Remember, if someone needs to reach you in an emergency, they will pick up the phone. When you respond quickly to every email, two things happen. First, you put too much pressure on yourself. Second, you set the expectation with other people that you'll always respond instantaneously — which sets you up for failure when you have to (or want to) take a break from your inbox.

Consider disabling your email notifications so you're not hearing alerts or seeing pop-ups throughout the day. They're constant distractions and can make you feel like you need to stop what you're doing and see what just came in. According to researchers, this kind of multitasking zaps your productivity and is actually harmful to your brain. Factor in the loss of efficiency you experience if you're flipping back and forth between emails and other work, and you've got one serious distraction.

Aside from avoiding the habit of checking emails too often, you'll also want to actively take steps to reduce the number of emails you're receiving. For example, tell coworkers to avoid copying you in on emails unless it's absolutely necessary and unsubscribe from email lists that no longer meet your needs.

*By looking at email from a new perspective, you can increase your productivity and efficiency while decreasing your stress. Is it time for you to make a change?*

## RULES OF THUMB FOR TIMELY RESPONSES

In the business world, how quickly you should reply to an email or return a phone call depends on the nature of the communication. But it's never acceptable to not respond at all to people:

- You are doing business with
- You want to do business with
- That can refer business to you
- Who were referred

Conventional wisdom says to respond in a timely manner to emails and calls, often defined as within 24-48 hours. If you don't have an immediate answer to a question, reply to acknowledge receipt of the email or phone message and give a time frame of when you'll be able to respond completely.

What's in it for you if you get back to people promptly? It fosters a reputation of reliability, and paints you as a professional who's considerate of others. In fact, since ignoring emails and calls is now so commonplace, simply responding in a timely way can put you way ahead of your competition.





# Guthrie County Hospital and Clinics

**Bandwidth is an increasingly vital part of delivering health care**

Guthrie County Hospital is a 25-bed Critical Access Hospital (CAH) located in Guthrie Center, Iowa. The CAH designation is given to certain rural hospitals by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to reduce their financial vulnerability and improve patient access to health care by keeping essential services in rural communities.

## **A Variety of Disciplines, Several Locations**

As stated on its website, Guthrie County Hospital is dedicated to “meeting the health care needs of our community through personalized treatment with up-to-the-minute training in a variety of disciplines and nurturing care that allows our patients to improve in a familiar environment close to home.”

To provide a full range of health care services that are easily accessible to area residents, Guthrie County Hospital also operates the GCH Specialty Clinic in Guthrie Center and GCH Family Medicine Clinics in Adair, Panora, and Stuart.

Guthrie County Hospital provides services including 24/7 Emergency Care, Cardiac Rehabilitation, Fitness Center, Laboratory, Medical Nutritional Therapy, Outpatient Infusion & Injections, Physical Therapy, Occupational & Speech Therapy, Pulmonary Rehabilitation, Radiology Services, Sleep Studies, Social Services, Surgery, and Skilled Care.

The GCH Specialty Clinic offers Audiology, Internal Medicine, Cardiology, Mental Health, Skin Health,

Nephrology, Ear, Nose & Throat, Radiology Services, Oncology, Gastroenterology, Gynecology, Orthopedics, Pain Clinic, Physical Medicine, Plastic Surgery, Podiatry, Sleep Studies, and Surgery.

## **TLAN Provides More Bandwidth**

Keeping these facilities connected in terms of electronic communications is one of the responsibilities of Jeff Cobb, IT Manager for Guthrie County Hospital. Cobb notes, “The number of applications required to operate a health care facility has increased dramatically over the last several years, so more bandwidth became essential in order to offer all the applications and services our users need every day.”

Several years ago, Panora Telco and Guthrie Center Communications replaced the previously used T1 circuit with TLAN (Transparent Local Area Network) service to provide more bandwidth. “The flexibility of bandwidth options and security of the TLAN are key features that make the service very valuable. By utilizing a reliable service like TLAN, our staff is able to access patient records more efficiently than ever before and communicate with all of our locations with greater ease and efficiency,” explains Cobb.

He adds, “The fact that local support is always available is certainly a huge benefit of working with Panora Telco and Guthrie Center Communications. We work with many different vendors across a wide range of products and services. The ability to speak at any time with someone that cares, no matter what the issue may be, is simply not possible with some other vendors. We greatly appreciate that the services we get from Panora Telco and Guthrie Center Communications are very consistent and reliable.”

### Healthy Growth in 2017

What’s ahead for Guthrie County Hospital in 2017? CEO Pat Peters responds, “I would say a couple of things. First, the hospital remodel will be completed at the beginning of the year. This includes a beautiful new entrance vestibule, an infusion suite, a negative pressure isolation room to contain airborne contaminants, and a newly remodeled specialty clinic area. Guthrie County Hospital will also open an outpatient psychiatry clinic in January 2017; Megan Stukenholtz, ARNP, certified in psychiatry and family medicine, will begin seeing patients on Tuesday, January 3.”

Panora Telco and Guthrie Center Communications are grateful to play a role in helping Guthrie County Hospital and Clinics keep our communities healthier.

***The number of applications required to operate a health care facility has increased dramatically over the last several years, so more bandwidth became essential.***

—JEFF COBB, IT MANAGER, GUTHRIE COUNTY HOSPITAL



### WHO'S MINDING YOUR BUSINESS?

#### Andy Carson

Combination Technician

Andy Carson has been employed by Panora Telco since December 2001. He previously attended Des Moines Area Community College and went through their telecommunications program.

As Combination Technician, Carson has a variety of responsibilities. He explains, “I install and repair services at customer locations and help with installing and splicing the fiber-optic cable that carries the services that Panora Telco provides. In addition, I help install and maintain the fiber access equipment and Fiber TV equipment located in our central office and remote sites.”

Carson was a key employee during the process in which Guthrie County Hospital set up their TLAN with Panora Telco and Guthrie Center Communications fiber services.

What does Carson enjoy most about his job? “I like the variety that comes along with it. I also like working with the new technologies that keep developing in the field of telecommunications.”

# How to Stop the Rumor Mill

Workplace gossip can  
have costly repercussions



**P**ssst. Have you heard the latest? Office rumors can be more than just annoying. They can adversely affect morale and productivity, especially if they concern possible layoffs or other major company changes. If you're a manager facing this problem, don't just silently watch while gossipmongers spread their poison—take action. Remember, any courageous individual can begin to eliminate rumors. Below are three effective steps to help you move forward in your rumor-fighting efforts:

**When someone tells you a rumor, do more than merely refuse to pass it on.** Respectfully and directly share with the person (a) your intention to not let this information go any further, and (b) the reasons you believe passing along this kind of information is hurtful. The better you help others see the negative consequences of their actions, the more likely they are to limit this behavior in the future.

**Identify those who might have influence with the people spreading rumors, and engage them in a similar conversation.** For example, you may be aware of several people who seem to form the “information hub” in your office. If you have a strong enough relationship with one or two of them, approach them directly. If not, you may have some influence with someone else who has influence with them. Engage this person, and see if he or she agrees on the merits of approaching these individuals.

**If you have information that could discredit a rumor, share it.** Rumors, like mushrooms, require darkness to grow. By shedding light on the topic, you can help to squelch the rumor's power. Keep in mind that if everyone is talking except management, employees tend to assume the worst. VitalSmarts, a corporate training company, recommends that you gather staff members together and use your STATE skills. STATE stands for “Share your facts, Tell your story, Ask for others' paths, Talk tentatively, and Encourage testing.” By following this process, you help others see why you've concluded there are inaccurate rumors floating around, based on the more credible information you provide. Be sure to create an atmosphere that makes people feel safe to engage in dialogue—not monologue—in these sessions.

Some companies, during times of extreme stress and change, actually hold “Rumor of the Week” meetings. The purpose is to replace rumors with accurate information. When a manager can't answer a question for reasons of propriety or because decisions have not yet been made, he or she will acknowledge that information wasn't available and commit to share the information as soon as possible. Such forthrightness and honesty make these sessions a highly valued source of information. The rumor mill will still run, but it will run with far less efficiency.



# 7 Steps

## for Dealing With Difficult Customers

It's a common challenge in the business world—a customer who's angry about an unsatisfactory product or service. He or she may even be rude or threatening while talking to you. To diffuse the situation and ultimately arrive at a positive conclusion, follow these steps:

**1. Keep your emotions in check.** Customers may make disparaging and emotional remarks; don't rise to the bait. Instead, handle the exchange with poise. Remember that employees and other customers may hear the conversation.

**2. Listen actively.** The most important step in this process is listening to what the customer says about the grievances. Begin with a neutral statement such as, "Please tell me what happened." Then give the conversation your full attention and don't allow anything to interrupt it.

**3. Restate the problem.** In your own words, repeat the customer's concerns to make sure you've identified the problem correctly. This also shows the customer you were listening carefully, which can help lower the levels of anger and stress.

**4. Express empathy and apologize.** Demonstrate by your words and tone that you understand why the customer is upset. For example, you could say, "I understand that your order was not delivered to you on time and the lateness caused problems for you. I apologize that we didn't fulfill our promise."

**5. Ask for the desired solution.** Instead of instantly offering your own solution to the problem, first ask the customer what would make him/her happy. This shows you are serious about righting the wrong. You may or may not be able to give the customer exactly what's requested, but at least you have a place to start developing the solution.

**6. Follow up with the customer.** A few days after you believe the solution has taken place, call to check on the customer's satisfaction. This shows you cared enough to follow up and helps set the stage for a stronger customer relationship going forward.

**7. Learn from complaints.** There may be a valuable lesson buried in the words of angry customers. Is there an employee that needs additional training? Does your work process need to be streamlined? Is it time to update your technology? Pay attention to the issues raised by customers and look for ways to reduce the likelihood of their occurrence in the future. Your business will be better for it.

*Dealing with difficult customers can be, well, difficult. But if handled with care, these conversations can actually lead to stronger customer relationships and a more successful business.*



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

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