Mobile supports the good life in the scenic Texas hills

About the City of Boerne
The once-quiet community of Boerne, Texas has experienced significant growth in recent years. Boerne’s historic downtown and location as a front door to the Texas hill country have drawn tourists and stimulated residential and commercial development. The U.S. Census Bureau lists it as one of the fastest-growing communities in the U.S., and several publications have recognized it as one of the nation’s most desirable places to live.

Situation
City efforts to make the Boerne experience unique and worthwhile have paid off in spades. In just a decade, Boerne’s population expanded by 70 percent, and tourism regularly attracts thousands to the small community. Officials welcomed the growth but struggled to ensure that the city’s infrastructure and public safety department could keep up with the demand without compromising residents’ quality of life.

Solution
A myriad of mobility applications have been deployed to support city services and share the word about the good life in Boerne. The growing community uses mobile connectivity, mobile messaging and mobile device management – all from AT&T – to communicate with its public safety forces and other city workers, residents and visitors. The solutions help the city respond faster and be more proactive.

Leading the Pack in Technology Use
Boerne, Texas has a lot going for it. The Hill Country Mile, a stretch of historic Main Street with beautifully maintained historic architecture, restaurants and galleries, is the vibrant center of community life. Boerne’s popular festivals, biking and hiking trails, and two of Texas’ seven Show Caves attract thousands of visitors a year.

The Boerne Independent School District, the town’s largest employer, has made Boerne a destination for families in search of a top-notch education. City Information Technology Director Mike Raute said residents feel a justifiable hometown pride. “They’re very proud of the school system, historic district, and city government that support a good quality of life,” he said.

Unlike many places Boerne owns the community’s electric, water, gas and sewer utilities. Raute joined the city as a utility meter reader in the late 1990s, shortly after earning a degree in electronics. At that time, the Internet wasn’t a large part of city operations - Boerne had only a dozen computers with Internet capability. As the city developed, Raute began working part time and eventually full time in the city’s expanding IT Department.

“Technology has grown so fast here over the course of 17 years,” he said. “We now have 250 users, all with email and Internet access.” Many city workers also use smartphones and tablets to do their jobs more efficiently. “We’re much more advanced in technology than other communities,” Raute said. “Thanks to a good city council, city manager and mayor that aren’t afraid to change, we’re leading the pack.”

City officials understand that technology can be a differentiator for their community. “Just as the quality of life attracts residents, with

City of Boerne Facts

Government Needs
Better ways to communicate with internal city resources, citizens and tourists

Networking Solution
Mobility solutions connect first responders with dispatch and enable direct communications between the city, its residents and visitors

Government Value
Enhances communication, increases efficiencies and supports high quality of life

Industry Focus
City Government

Size
10,000 residents
technology we can be faster and stronger in the ways we protect citizens and visitors,” he said. People no longer have time to go to city hall to pay a bill or arrange new utility service. “It’s better if they can do that all through technology,” Raute added. “Believe it or not, residents do look for that when they’re moving to a community.”

Boerne’s population increased by 70 percent between 2000 and 2010, creating some challenges for city officials. “Whether it’s infrastructure or public safety, the biggest challenge that Boerne faces is managing our growth,” Raute said. “We want to have good growth, economic development that brings high paying jobs and good retail operations, yet we want to keep the quaint down-home charm in Boerne.”

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– Mike Raute, Information Technology Director, City of Boerne, TX

Staying Connected
The city recently needed a way to supply Internet connectivity and cost-effective computers to enable police on patrol to run license plate checks and access other information. “They also needed connectivity to message other officers at times when they preferred to avoid radio communications,” Raute said. In addition, police, firefighters and code enforcement officers frequently need to access maps and other documents from the road.

Boerne selected AT&T to supply connectivity to its safety forces and other city workers. Officers had been using laptops and accessing the Internet via AT&T wireless Internet cards. Increasingly, more are turning to tablets and smartphones and connecting via the nation’s most reliable 4G LTE network. “The biggest benefits are cost savings and better quality of service,” Raute said. Maps provide the quickest route to a location, which speeds response times. Officers are able access the resources they need while on patrol rather than returning to the station.

Connectivity also increases police effectiveness by supporting remote video cameras mounted throughout town that transmit back to the police station. “Not only do we have police presence on the ground, we have police presence in the sky,” Raute said. In addition, the city uses portable surveillance units that it can set up wherever crowds are expected, such as at festivals, and to monitor roadways for flooding during the rainy season. In the near future, the city is considering additional public surveillance cameras to further discourage crime.

Supporting Paperless Operations
While the city initially outfitted its patrol cars with ruggedized laptops, it has become one of the first in Texas to deploy tablet computers. “Instead of $4,000 for a laptop, plus $1,500 for mounting hardware, we now pay about $1,000 per tablet and $750 for mounting. That’s a huge cost savings,” Raute said.

Because the tablets can record video and audio, they also replace a separate video camera and voice recorder that police formerly used. “That savings can go can go to buy body armor or more training for the police officers,” he said. The tablets also save space, since laptop mounting units formerly took up most of the front passenger seat.

The city now plans to issue tablets provided through AT&T to every officer, which it could not do with laptops because of the cost. The portability of the devices means the police generally take them along when they go to lunch, which makes it easier to keep officers updated. “They love the tablets. The connectivity is better, so they seem to embrace them more,” Raute said. “And we’ve noticed that the officer takes more initiative to take care of the tablet because it’s actually assigned to him or her.”

The city administration has also begun using tablets to support a paperless environment. Instead of waiting for a weekly binder of information to be compiled, copied, collated and delivered to their homes, council members now remotely download each meeting’s agenda and supporting materials to their tablets.

Keeping Track
With its safety forces and administration using mobile devices to conduct city business, Boerne needed a way to protect the information on them to meet Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) requirements. The city chose MobileIron Virtual Smartphone Platform (VSP) from AT&T to provide security for all of the city’s tablets and cell phones. “Now we can lock a device or erase it if it’s lost or stolen,” Raute said. “If we were not in CJIS compliance, we’d lose our connection with Department of Public Safety and the federal government, which is used to run checks on car registrations, drivers’ licenses and criminal histories.”

The solution came in handy recently when the mayor’s tablet and cell phone were stolen from his vehicle while he was at a conference out of town, Raute said. The IT Department was quickly able to wipe both devices.

In addition to helping the city comply with federal regulations, MobileIron VSP from AT&T lets Boerne’s IT team know what’s on each device and how it’s being used. “We have close to 250 mobile devices,” Raute said. “This gives us a good tool for keeping track of our inventory so that we can monitor everything.”

Boerne considered other solutions, but rejected them because of significant upfront costs. “With AT&T and its relationship with MobileIron we were able to add it as a monthly cost,” he said.

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– Mike Raute, Information Technology Director, City of Boerne, TX

An Enhanced Way to Communicate
In another move, the City of Boerne has implemented AT&T Enhanced Push-to-Talk to support its police, fire and EMT traffic as well as the field communications of its utility workers. “We implemented AT&T Enhanced Push-to-Talk and it’s worked out really well,” Raute said.

Police officers serving in Boerne schools use Enhanced Push-to-Talk to handle any issues that arise on campus. “Since Boerne Independent School District also went with EPTT, AT&T helped us to make a connection with their network,” he said. “If there’s ever a situation that arises, the schools can use it to contact police dispatch, because we have a dispatch console with Enhanced Push-to-Talk.”
The solution helps keep officials prepared. “The security and the communication build on Boerne’s reputation as a destination school district,” he said. “EPTT is just another tool to help our kids, because it’s a straight connection to the police department.”

EPTT has decreased the city’s wireless phone bills, since EPTT conversations are usually much shorter than cell phone calls. “It’s a better way of communicating,” Raute said. It also enables public works and parks department workers to communicate with one another and still connect with their dispatch and police dispatch. He said Boerne plans to add EPTT Integrated Dispatch, which will give dispatchers the ability to locate, alert and view presence status of officers in near real-time.

**Democracy by Text Message**

Boerne continues to attract new residents because it honors its historic past while embracing new solutions to better serve its growing population. When it needed to replace an antiquated reverse 911 messaging system, Boerne chose AT&T Messaging Toolkit. The solution enables the city to communicate rapidly to alert residents about rising flood waters, power outages or other potential situations.

People can sign up to receive alerts from the city. “It’s been received really well,” Raute said. “Our most popular notifications are about street closures, because of transportation and mobility issues.”

Boerne is also using the AT&T Messaging Toolkit to get residents’ input on public art. A local artist will display 10 pieces during the coming year. “Citizens can text the city to vote for the one they like best. When the year is up, the city will purchase the art that received the most votes,” he said. Raute believes Boerne residents and visitors will embrace texting because TV reality shows have made text voting so popular. “I think the Messaging Toolkit will help us in many ways,” he said.

Raute often endorses AT&T because of the effectiveness of its solutions and the experience of his account team. “They’ve always been professional and very willing to help,” he said. “Working with AT&T has been a good experience and I recommend it every time I get the chance.”

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