Accelerating Broadband Stimulus Success

COMPANY

Atlantic Telephone Membership Corporation (ATMC)

BUSINESS TYPE

Rural ILEC/CLP

LOCATION

Brunswick / Columbus Counties, NC

NETWORK

Serves over 35,000 customers

SERVICES

Voice, High-speed Internet, Cable TV, Wireless, Business, and Security Services

CALIX SOLUTIONS

E7-2, Extended Reach GPON, 700GE ONT Family, CMS

ATMC

THE CHALLENGE

In 1955, Atlantic Telephone Membership Corporation (ATMC) was founded by its cooperative membership to bring telephone service to Brunswick County, a rural county in southeast North Carolina, after larger telephone companies were not interested in bringing service to the area. Dedicated to its community, ATMC grew to become the largest communications cooperative in North Carolina with an innovative approach that continued to introduce new services such as high-speed Internet, business-class communications, cable TV, and security services to its membership.

Over 50 years later, neighboring Columbus County found itself in a situation similar to ATMC's historic predicament – but in this case their region was being passed over by an incumbent service provider who didn't want to make the investments necessary to deliver broadband to everyone. Desperate, Columbus County residents and businesses reached out to ATMC asking the company to step in to help bring them broadband and into the 21st century.

THE SOLUTION

ATMC secured a $16 million Broadband Stimulus award in August of 2010 to serve Columbus County. After being notified of the award, ATMC quickly built a plan to efficiently utilize the funds to serve nearly 4000 homes and businesses located in some of the county's most rural areas. Working closely with local government agencies and the North Carolina Department of Transportation, ATMC quickly procured the physical locations, permits, and rights-of-way necessary for network deployment. Concurrently, they ordered the 260 miles of fiber the project required, and selected the best local contractors to help build the network. ATMC then selected the Calix E7-2 Ethernet Service Access Platform (ESAP) to deploy GPON and Extended Reach GPON for the stimulus project. With the standards-based Extended Reach GPON, ATMC was able to reach customer locations as far as 24 miles away from the optical line terminal (OLT), which allowed ATMC to only build three OLT sites to serve the entire project area. In addition, the long-standing relationship Calix has with Calix Compatible partner Metaswitch, allowed ATMC to easily convert to a new softswitch with no interoperability issues, while maintaining focus on the Columbus County project. With all of these aspects of the project locked down, ATMC was ready to begin their Broadband Stimulus network build the very day they had the funds in hand.

THE RESULTS

In the first six months after construction began on the Columbus County Broadband Stimulus project, ATMC had already achieved a great deal of success.

◄ **Marketing Program** – Along with the engineering portions of the project, ATMC pre-marketed the benefits of fiber services in Columbus County using billboards and a project-specific website, IwantATMC.com. The website's purpose was to keep customers up to date on construction progress and when service would be available to them. Within two weeks of launching the website, 100 customers who live along initial 32-mile ring had called to express interest in becoming a customer. In addition, as each new customer had services turned up, a bold, blue "I Switched" sign was placed in their yard. It wasn't long until the signs were popping up all over the place and driving even greater interest in ATMC services.

◄ **Deployment Time** – All of the preparation work paid off with accelerated construction timelines. In the first 11 months, ATMC deployed 215 miles of fiber and had plowed service drops to over 800 customer premises. Just over one year after construction began, the entire 260-mile fiber network will be complete.

◄ **Take Rates** – With the success of the marketing program and quick deployment times, ATMC has seen a great response from Columbus County residents and businesses. ATMC achieved a 33 percent service take rate for homes passed within the first six months of deployment.

◄ **Advanced Services** – The GPON-based fiber network allows ATMC to deliver advanced broadband services to Columbus County, offering voice, high-definition television, and high-speed Internet with speeds up to 50 Mbps. ATMC is also seeing higher service penetration per new customer with an average of 2.25 services being taken.

◄ **Efficiency** – The efficiency of ATMC's operational model has been seen in both its time-to-market, but also in the management of the network. With only three OLT sites, ATMC saved its capital resources with less property and equipment investment required up front. In addition, the OLT sites still have the capacity to continue to expand services for new residents and businesses.

THE FUTURE

This Broadband Stimulus project has already delivered on the promise of economic development for ATMC customers. New subscribers are taking advantage of online college courses, videoconferencing, and telecommuting for some local engineers and educators. One local manufacturing business has also been able to extend its business to international customers, which was not possible without broadband.

With this new addition to its traditional serving area, ATMC is looking to stay on the cutting edge of services and technology. A new investment in a Microsoft Mediaroom headend is a prime example of how ATMC is looking to further differentiate its service offering with more high-definition programming and video services which provide customers with the entertainment options they want. As the traditional service provider business model continues to undergo a transformation, ATMC is committed to staying ahead of the competition, improving efficiencies, and delivering the best quality of service to the communities it serves.

"At ATMC, we are changing our way of thinking in order to stay competitive and deliver the services our customers want. Our traditional business model is evolving, so we will be smart and aggressive to keep our business thriving."

– Allen Russ, CEO