

How Three Franchise Owners Reduced Complexity and Gained Flexibility with Cloud Communications

Progressive companies of all sizes today are taking advantage of new, web-based technologies to reduce IT complexity and increase their competitiveness.

Mobile apps and devices that provide anywhere, anytime connectivity and cloud infrastructure that enables seamless, scalable growth, give them the speed and flexibility to grow quickly and expand into new markets.

Following are three examples of forward-thinking franchise owners and entrepreneurs that are growing their businesses and positioning themselves for the future with unified communications solutions.

“Our 8x8 phone system is kind of invisible because it just works. 8x8 is exceedingly reliable—no care or feeding required!

— Jay Daniel, IT consultant for McDonalds Nashville





Customer: McDonald's

Industry: Fast-food restaurants

Locations:
24 locations in and around Nashville, Tennessee

8x8 Products: Virtual Office

Number of Extensions: 90+

Favorite 8x8 Feature:
High-quality analog adapters that enable cordless phones and fax machines in the restaurants

Primary Reason Chose 8x8:
Fully hosted solution with predictable monthly costs

Franchisee Lowers Phone Bill by 35% and Achieves Highest Regional Uptime

McDonald's

Challenge:

Contrary to popular belief, VoIP phone service isn't always cheap—you have to pick the right provider. That's the reality IT consultant Jay Daniel faced when a McDonald's franchisee in Nashville, Tennessee asked him for help back in 2010. Although phone service for the franchisee's 20 restaurants was being hosted by a local Internet service provider (ISP), costs were out of control and downtime was a constant problem. With the service contract about to end, the franchisee asked Daniel to recommend a replacement system.

In Daniel's view, the McDonald's franchisee was not getting the best deal from the local ISP. He was renting outdated Cisco phones for \$20 a month and paying per-minute charges for toll and long distance calls. In fact, Daniel estimates he was only saving about 20% over the cost of traditional copper lines. "The restaurant owner was paying too much and not getting a lot for it," says Daniel. "The local ISP had taken advantage of the fact that he was not tech-savvy."

Daniel, however, knew what to look for: a fully hosted solution with predictable monthly costs and highly reliable uptime.

Solution:

Having worked with a number of different VoIP providers in the past, Daniel quickly came up with a short list of candidates for the replacement system. 8x8 was one of them. "For this client, I liked the idea of a hosted solution," he explains. "I knew it would help them keep their TCO [total cost of ownership] down."

In considering bids from two other VoIP providers, Daniel soon discovered deal-breakers. The first company wanted the franchisee to maintain service via SIP trunking, which would significantly increase TCO and not be cost-effective. The second company offered only metered service, which would make the franchisee's phone costs unpredictable.

"8x8 won out because of the numbers," says Daniel. "Their fees were lower and consistent from month to month. It was a much better cost structure for a franchisee with 20 restaurants distributed across two counties."

Although the McDonald's franchisee only needed standard 8x8 service at the restaurants, there was a challenging complication: the 20 sites had more than 80 telephone numbers from over a dozen different providers! All of these numbers had to be ported to the 8x8 system, while incurring as little downtime as possible for the restaurants.

"8x8 managed the number porting for us and they did a beautiful job," says Daniel. "There was very little downtime, and the whole process was smooth as ice."

Within 12 weeks, all the restaurants' numbers had been successfully ported over to 8x8, and by January 2011, all 20 restaurants had moved to 8x8 service.



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Results:

Since switching to 8x8, the franchisee's phone costs have gone down 35%, which is less than half the cost of traditional landline service. Downtime has also been dramatically reduced. "We used to have at least one restaurant down every single day," says Daniel, who has continued on as IT director for the franchisee. "Now we have the most uptime of any McDonald's franchise in the Indianapolis region, which includes the greater Nashville area."

Restaurant environments are notoriously hard on IT equipment. McDonald's managers use high-quality desk phones in their offices, but out on the restaurant floor, cordless phones are a must. The local ISP had used analog adapters that were not robust and did not deliver good voice quality. Daniel and the McDonald's franchisee were pleased to find that 8x8's analog telephone adapter (ATA) technology works very well.

"With 8x8's ATA adapters, we can purchase inexpensive phones and fax machines for the restaurants and then replace them as needed," says Daniel. "The adapters are very easy to use—we just plug them in and they work! The voice quality is also much better than what we had before."

In addition, Daniel appreciates 8x8's easy-to-use, web-based system administration features, which enable him to configure phone features for the restaurants. "Our restaurants are busy and can't typically return calls, so we disable features like voicemail and call waiting on our main public numbers," he explains. "Before, it was either impossible to deactivate those features, or we had to go through the ISP to do it. With 8x8, we can set up our own configuration directly, without waiting for outside help."

In October 2013, Phil Gray purchased the McDonald's restaurants from the previous owner. He now has 24 locations, and plans to further expand the franchise. Thanks to 8x8, the ramp-up time for new locations is just a few days. "About a week before we're due to open a new location, we go to the restaurant site and plug in the ATA adapters," Gray explains. "Once we confirm they're working, we know we're ready to go."

These days there's a lot of buzz about ensuring a good customer experience, but Daniel likes the fact that he rarely has to ask for support. "Our 8x8 phone system is kind of invisible because it just works," he says. "It's amazing how few problems we have and how few devices have failed. 8x8 is exceedingly reliable—no care or feeding required!"



Hosted VoIP Seamlessly Connects Real Estate Agents Wherever They Work

Customer Name: RE/MAX
Tri County

Industry: Real estate

Location: Hamilton, New Jersey

8x8 Products: Virtual Office

Favorite 8x8 Features:

- Follow-me connectivity for mobile and work-at-home agents
- 8x8 mobile app
- Internet fax
- Easy setup for new agents

Initial Setup: 80+ Virtual Office lines

Time to Deploy: 3 days

Connectivity Type: Ethernet

Vendor Replaced:
NEC Voicemail-Auto Attendant System using Aspire phones

Primary Reason Chose 8x8:
Company wanted a hosted VoIP solution, and 8x8 was highly recommended by a business partner

Website:
mercercountyhomesforsale.com

RE/MAX

When Rosalie Daniels founded RE/MAX Tri County in Hamilton, New Jersey, in 1991, she wasn't interested in running a traditional real estate company. Her business philosophy is to empower independent agents by letting them spread their wings while operating under the RE/MAX umbrella.

"Our company is like a professional association of doctors or lawyers who all work for the same firm," she explains. "Agents pay their share of expenses and get to keep their entire commission less a franchise fee. It's a very appealing economic model for independent agents, and it's made our business successful from the beginning."

Over the years, that success has grown to include 57 agents who handle both residential and commercial real estate. In keeping with Daniel's supportive but flexible approach, about 40% of the company's agents regularly work from home, and the remaining 60% work out of the company's main office.

Challenge:

When Hurricane Sandy struck in 2012, the company's office was spared direct damage, but recurring brownouts damaged the hard drive of its 14-year-old NEC phone system. Daniels and her office manager, Mary Mammino, had dealt with repairing the phone system once before, when their building was struck by lightning. This time the prognosis was more dire: the hard drive was too old to be repaired and needed to be replaced quickly.

"Our PBX was still working, but we were limping along," says Mammino. "Because parts of the hard drive were damaged, features like electronic fax and voicemail were not reliable anymore. We knew it was just a matter of time before the whole system went down." Daniels had started looking into new phone technologies even before Hurricane Sandy, because she knew the NEC system was approaching its end of life. Although she didn't have a specific vendor in mind, she did have one key criterion.

"I wanted our new phone system to be off site," says Daniels. "I'd heard a lot of good things about hosted VoIP service, and it didn't make sense for us to take on the burden of purchasing, installing and maintaining another on-site system."

Solution:

Daniels and Mammino attended the annual statewide RE/MAX sales rally—and got a tip from a business partner that pointed them toward 8x8.

"A local title company we often work with heard we were looking for a new phone system," explains Daniels. "They told us about their 8x8 hosted VoIP service and how great it was. It turned out their 8x8 account manager was also at the RE/MAX sales rally, so they introduced us, and everything fell into place."

Daniels and Mammino worked with 8x8 to develop a proposal for a new system. Once that happened, the entire installation process took just three days.



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Results:

With 8x8 hosted VoIP service, every RE/MAX Tri County agent now has a direct phone line and can take calls anywhere. This means even the company's many work-at-home agents are now seamlessly connected to the main office.

"With our old system, we couldn't transfer callers to agents who worked at home," explains Mammino. "Our receptionist would have to take a message and have the agent call back, or she would have to give out the agent's home number or mobile phone number."

As a business owner, Daniels appreciates the way 8x8's Follow-Me service makes her organisation look unified. "With 8x8, we can route calls right away—to the agent's home, mobile phone or computer. The caller has no idea that the agent is not in the office," she says. "8x8's service is absolutely seamless, and lets us handle incoming calls much more efficiently."

Like many real estate companies, RE/MAX Tri County relies heavily on faxing to transmit signed documents. 8x8's Internet fax feature has dramatically improved both the timeliness and security of faxed materials for the company.

"8x8 turns faxes into electronic documents that agents receive on their computers or their phones," says Mammino. "They can see them and respond immediately, which is essential in our business."

"Old-fashioned faxing is unreliable and not secure," agrees Daniels. "The financial documents we receive often include highly confidential information. When they come in over a fax machine, anybody can see them. With 8x8, faxes go directly to the correct party and no one else."

Agents see all their email and voicemail messages in their inboxes, too. They can read or listen to messages using their smartphones or computers without having to switch devices.

Daniels notes that agents can even review messages or answer calls on their computers and then log in to modify their call forwarding and other account features. "By turning the computer into a softphone, 8x8 lets our agents do everything on the same machine. It streamlines the phone system for them and is a big time savings."

The mobile features included in the company's 8x8 hosted VoIP service ensure they never miss sales calls. "Our agents can log into their 8x8 accounts and choose where and how they want their calls routed," says Daniels. "It truly lets them work from anywhere."

Daniels experienced that freedom first-hand during a recent trip to Mexico. She used the 8x8 mobile app on her smartphone to answer business calls. "Nobody even knew I was gone," she exclaims. "People would call my regular office number, and I would answer on my mobile phone as if I were there. And it was all done through 8x8 VoIP service, so there were no extra charges on my mobile phone."

Daniels and Mammino estimate that about 80% of the company's agents are now using the 8x8 mobile app on their iPhones or Android phones. The remaining 20% simply log in and forward calls to their mobile phones when they're on the go. "We do a lot of business on our mobile phones, and 8x8 makes it easy for agents to take the office with them," says Daniels.

As the office manager, Mammino is responsible for setting up new agents on the company's phone system. In the past, it was a tiered process that took several days and communications with several different companies. "It was horrendous," she recalls. "Our agents didn't have direct lines, so we had to work with the vendor who managed our phone system and then work with the phone company to get new extensions for our agents."

Now with 8x8 hosted VoIP service, the process takes just a few minutes. "To set up new agents, I contact our 8x8 account manager to add the lines we need. He typically gets back to me within a couple of hours, and then I set up the new agent profiles online. It's very easy and only takes about 30 minutes," says Mammino. "Before we were at the mercy of our vendors and service providers," adds Daniels. "8x8 gives us state-of-the-art equipment and great support, plus we still have full control over our phone system and our business."

Daniels and Mammino are confident that 8x8 hosted VoIP will continue to serve the company well—no matter what natural disasters might come their way. "With 8x8 and its mobile app, we can always use our mobile phones to run the business if the power goes out," says Mammino. "Having a hosted system gives us more peace of mind."



Customer: Fix Auto San Jose

Industry: Auto body shop and collision repairs

Locations: San Jose and Gilroy, California

Initial Setup: 14 Virtual Office lines

Favorite 8x8 Feature:
Ring groups that enable either location to answer incoming calls

Time to Deploy: 2 weeks

Vendor Replaced: AT&T

Reasons for choosing 8x8:

- Recommended by fellow business owner
- Ease of implementation and use

Website:
www.fixauto.com/san-jose/index.sn

VoIP Helps Auto Repair Franchisee Provide Amazing Customer Service

Fix Auto

Fix Auto is a network of 54 auto body shops, all maintaining the same standards of quality, ethics and performance. In 2011, Mary Oliver and her business partner converted two independent body shops into Fix Auto franchises operating in San Jose and Gilroy, California. Although the San Jose and Gilroy shops are part of a national chain, they still maintain a family atmosphere, especially when dealing with customers. In addition to offering the convenience of one-stop shopping for vehicle repair, they simplify the claims process so that customers can get back on the road as quickly as possible. The company's commitment to quality and customer service is reflected in its outstanding customer service index (CSI) scores and Yelp reviews.

Challenge:

When Oliver joined Fix Auto in 2011, the business had been using a standard AT&T landline telephone system for many years. Not only was the technology old, so was the building's copper wire infrastructure. That combination resulted in static on the line, dropped calls, and poor voice quality. "The lines to our building were underground and more than 25 years old," explains Oliver. "Every time it rained, we had problems with our phone system because the insulation around the underground wiring had worn off."

Another serious problem was call coverage. "We didn't have enough full-time staff in Gilroy to answer the phones live and a lot of calls were going to voicemail," says Oliver. "In our industry, customers want to talk to someone right away, especially if they've been in an accident and need to schedule repairs or a tow. If you miss their call, they call someone else."



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Solution:

Oliver and her partner realised they needed to replace their outdated phone system, but neither had the technical expertise to select a new one. They asked a friend and fellow small business owner for his recommendation. He gave them just one name: 8x8.

"I watched an online presentation of the 8x8 business VoIP system, and it looked like it was easy to set up and use," says Oliver. She then ordered new phones and within two weeks Fix Auto had its 8x8 business VoIP phone service up and running in both locations.

"Setting up the 8x8 system was even easier than I thought it would be," says Oliver. "We started installing our new phones and boom! Everything was working right out of the box. When I did have questions, I called 8x8 and got instant help."

Results:

By implementing an 8x8 business VoIP phone system, the busy repair shop now keeps customers happy and the business healthy. With Fix Auto's San Jose and Gilroy locations on the same 8x8 phone system, call coverage is no longer a problem. Using a simultaneous ring group, Fix Auto redirects unanswered calls from Gilroy to San Jose after two rings. Customers can talk to the receptionist or a staff member at the San Jose office, completely unaware that their call was transferred from Gilroy.

"8x8's ring group feature has significantly enhanced our customer service," says Oliver. "When a customer's been in an accident, they're often upset and don't want to wait for a callback. With 8x8, we can be there for customers no matter which office they call."

8x8's call transfer capability is also a much welcome improvement for Fix Auto. The company's receptionist can easily transfer calls to any extension at either location, or to a user's mobile phone without giving out their personal number. Transfers are "warm," which means the receptionist can talk with the party she is transferring to, make sure that person is available, pass along the caller's name, and summarise the purpose of the call before transferring.

"It's kind of like two features in one," says Oliver. "Our receptionist can first talk with the person she's transferring to before handing off the call. Both callers and staff appreciate that personal touch when calls are being transferred."

As a repair shop, Fix Auto frequently partners with insurance companies who send "assignments" detailing which part of the vehicle is covered for repairs from the current claim. Some insurance companies still use a fax machine to transmit assignments. Similarly, some of the company's auto parts vendors still prefer to receive a fax for parts orders and confirmations.

"Our industry has been slow to adopt newer technology, like email," says Oliver. "With 8x8, we can have a dedicated fax line at each shop location for a very affordable price. That's important because working with insurance companies and parts vendors is our bread and butter. We have to support their business models."

Oliver also likes the built-in business continuity of 8x8's transfer capability. If Fix Auto loses power or Internet connectivity, incoming calls are automatically transferred to Oliver's mobile phone and business goes on as usual.



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Fix Auto's receptionist does occasionally send calls to voicemail when the caller wants to leave a message for someone who's not available. When that happens, the recipient gets an email notification with a sound file attached so they can listen to the message right away.

"Receiving email notifications is very convenient because I check email all day long," says Oliver. "Instead of dialing into the voicemail system, I can click the email attachment and play the message immediately. It saves time, and helps me respond to callers promptly."

It also enabled Oliver to correct her franchise's CSI score when Fix Auto unexpectedly got low marks in a customer satisfaction survey conducted by a third party. Oliver reached out to the customer and received a callback that went to voicemail. In her message the customer assured Oliver that Fix Auto's service had been excellent. It turned out that the low score was caused by a bad connection during the third party's telephone survey. Oliver emailed the customer's voice message to Fix Auto's corporate headquarters so they could follow up with the survey provider and adjust her franchise's CSI score.

"Fix Auto CSI scores are supposed to be no lower than a 9 out of 10," says Oliver. "Getting a low score is something we take very seriously. Thanks to 8x8, I was able to clear up the misunderstanding with this customer. And corporate was very impressed that we can email our voicemail messages!"

Recently Oliver's franchise received a Fix Auto Vision Award for its efforts in promoting the chain's brand. According to Oliver, an important part of being a visionary is looking at where Fix Auto wants to go as a company.

"Our society is becoming very fast-paced, and businesses need efficient communication tools to keep up," says Oliver. "We switched to 8x8 business VoIP phone service because we're a little more tech-savvy here in Silicon Valley. I hope the success we're having inspires other Fix Auto franchises to adopt this amazing technology."

What Our Customers Are Saying

“8x8 gives us state-of-the-art equipment and great support, plus we still have full control over our phone system and our business.”

—Rosalie Daniels, Founder and Broker of RE/MAX Tri County

“8x8 won out because of the numbers. Their fees were lower and consistent from month to month. It was a much better cost structure for a franchisee with 20 restaurants distributed across two counties. (And) our 8x8 phone system is kind of invisible because it just works. It's amazing how few problems we have and how few devices have failed. 8x8 is exceedingly reliable— no care or feeding required!

—Jay Daniel, IT Consultant, McDonald's

“About a week before we're due to open a new location, we go to the restaurant site and plug in the ATA adapters. Once we confirm they're working, we know we're ready to go”

—Phil Gray, Owner and Operator of 24 McDonald's Locations

“Our society is becoming very fast-paced, and businesses need efficient communication tools to keep up. We switched to 8x8 business VoIP phone service because we're a little more tech-savvy here in Silicon Valley. I hope the success we're having inspires other Fix Auto franchises to adopt this amazing technology.”

—Mary Oliver, Owner of Fix Auto, San Jose and Gilroy, CA

To learn more, call **1800 854 171** or visit www.8x8.com/au

