



SPECIAL REPORT

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Vivint Smart Home Solves The Field Communication Conundrum

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Brett Barborka (left), director of field service for North America, and Kyle Christensen, communications manager for field service, of Vivint Smart Home

Vivint Smart Home Solves The Field Communication Conundrum

by Brian Albright

Many field service companies are using technology to automate and improve scheduling, routing, work order management, labor reporting, and other operations — but often fall short when it comes to basic communication and collaboration. In many cases, they rely on a mix of email, text messages, phone calls, or consumer messaging apps for communication between managers and technicians or among the technicians themselves. While these systems do facilitate communication, there are some

drawbacks. They can be difficult to manage, they provide little to no visibility or verification that messages were received, and they leave a significant chunk of valuable knowledge management information trapped in disparate messaging programs.

Vivint Smart Home is a leading smart home services provider based in Utah that is solving the communication conundrum for its 1,000 field technicians. The company has rolled out a secure mobile communication platform that has made it easier to relay important information, improve messaging visibility, and provide valuable efficiency and customer service benefits.

Meeting The Expectations Of 1 Million Customers

Identified as the top smart home service provider in the United States by Strategy Analytics, Vivint Smart Home serves more than 1 million customers in North America. The company's technicians install and maintain equipment and operate entirely from the field — most of the company's service professionals rarely report to a central office. In the past, that made communication among the home office, managers, trainers, and technicians challenging. Managers had to rely on phone calls and email to send orders, plans, and updates and relay other information to the field.

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Feature Article

Technicians were bombarded with emails, which meant that sometimes important communications were overlooked. Managers also had no visibility into whether particular technicians received or understood the information they were sending. “We were inundating their email inbox with so much information that sometimes it was difficult to manage,” says Kyle Christensen, communications manager for field service at Vivint Smart Home. “The tribal knowledge of our field workers was also getting lost. We knew that we could increase the timeliness — and value — of communication if we could get a communication platform that was quicker. We started looking for a direct messaging tool.”

In addition to the challenges with manager-to-field technician communication, the technicians themselves didn’t have an efficient or effective way to communicate with each other and share knowledge. They used ad hoc solutions like WhatsApp or GroupMe, but this meant that managers were left out of these conversations and the IT staff had little control over the applications being used — or information being shared — in the field.

“Our mobile workforce typically meets in person once every other month, and the field workers are miles away from managers,” adds Brett Barborka, director of field service for North America at Vivint Smart Home. “With email it was difficult for us to ensure consistent engagement with critical information.”

Seeking A Concise, Timely Communications Tool

Vivint Smart Home wanted more accountability and transparency in its communications. The field services team felt that a messaging tool could help narrow the scope of communications to critical information that the technicians needed to complete their work. Instead of requiring technicians to weed through a high volume of messages to find crucial details, the platform would deliver those details in an easier, more consumable way.

“We wanted a manager to know who received a particular message,” Christensen says. “We wanted something faster and more to the point, like a social media tool that could limit character count. Our professionals in the field need quick and timely communications, so they can focus on the most important information.”

The company engaged its mobile workforce when selecting a new communications tool and quickly identified the Zinc mobile communication platform, which is designed specifically for mobile workforces, including field service applications. According to Barborka, the Zinc platform offered a number of features that Vivint Smart Home believed would improve its operations. For example, employees can be easily organized into groups or teams using the tool. Urgent or important messages can be separated from day-to-day conversations. The field service team would also have access to functionality that would help them to collaborate more easily.

“Zinc is similar to email but more user-friendly,” Barborka

Efficient Communication Critical In Field Service

Vivint Smart Home needed a new messaging solution to help better manage communications with its 1,000-member field service force. To replace the existing hodge-podge of emails, texts, and consumer apps, the company turned to Zinc.

Zinc describes itself as a mobile-first solution that offers audio, video, group calling, location-sharing, and file-sharing capabilities. The company was founded as Cotap in 2013, but was relaunched as Zinc when the company shifted focus to larger enterprise field service deployments.

According to Brett Barborka, director of field service for North America at Vivint Smart Home, the flexibility of the Zinc platform made it easy



Vivint Smart Home uses a combination of technologies from Apple, ClickSoftware, Fleetmatics, and Zinc — among others — to optimize its field force.

to adapt the solution to the company’s operations. It was also very user-friendly, which made training and deployment go smoothly.

“We worked closely with Zinc on what our needs were, and they were very accommodating,” Barborka says. “They made some positive changes for us, and they are continually updating the software in ways that improves things for us. They’ve been very helpful.”

Zinc is a hosted solution. Users can create groups or teams for messaging, and management can send out mass messages or communicate directly with individual technicians. There is complete visibility so users can see who has actually read their messages.

Users can easily add voice, video, or photos to their messages and share their locations using maps. Companies can also add higher levels of encryption and data privacy, as well as set customer retention systems and access management rules.

Zinc also includes video and conference calling features, which Barborka says have been incredibly useful. “Before Zinc, we had to use dedicated lines and PIN numbers,” Barborka says. “Now, any team group can start a Zinc call, and everybody can join. You just push one button to set up a conference call. That’s saved a lot of time.” For more information, visit www.zinc.it.



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Brett Barborka, Vivint Smart Home

says. “It was easy to onboard and offboard users. We can push alerts to the entire field and control messages from one to many. We can also save messages that are important. Technicians can go back through the broadcast center feature and see all of the important updates saved in one place.”

Vivint Smart Home’s Field Technology Ecosystem

Vivint Smart Home was already leveraging a number of technologies to optimize field operations and incorporated Zinc into a much wider strategy already underway. All of Vivint Smart Home’s field technicians use company-issued iPads and iPhones that are managed with a mobile device management solution from MobileIron. The company also uses a proprietary application it developed called TechGenie that performs work order management, scheduling, and inventory management.

The scheduling component is driven by the ClickSoftware solution (which has been in place for more than eight years). “The ClickSoftware solution helps us optimize our field technicians’ workloads so we can get the most work done each day, and it gives us a comprehensive view of their schedules,” Barborka says. “It takes the manual effort out of self-dispatching, scheduling, and ticketing — and that has a huge impact.”

In 2016, Vivint Smart Home also deployed a fleet management solution from Fleetmatics to better manage its vehicles. Using the Fleetmatics devices installed in the trucks, the company can track the exact location of its vehicles and technicians. “Our ultimate goal for the fleet management system is safety,” Barborka says. “One of our core values is keeping our customers safe and secure through our products and services, and that core value

extends to keeping our employees safe as well.”

Using the Fleetmatics solution, managers can locate technicians and track driving habits. “We can check on driving behaviors and see if there is a need for improvements,” Barborka says. “We can also track our installation and service efficiency. Using geofencing, we can know exactly when our service professionals arrived on-site and when they left. We can use that data to optimize improvements in productivity.”

Intuitive Platform Makes Rapid Rollout Possible

In 2015, Vivint Smart Home piloted the Zinc platform with 50 technicians. After a short period, that pilot program was expanded to include several hundred technicians, and the solution has since been expanded across North America to the company’s 1,000+ field force.

Piloting the system was a key part of the company’s implementation. “Our model is to pilot with a subgroup of users,” Barborka says. “In this case, we had three teams using Zinc. We tracked communications with those groups and got weekly feedback. It was extremely positive.”

The end users in the pilot appreciated how easy it was to engage with coworkers and managers on the platform. “We can stay on top of things daily and track changes in real time,” Barborka says. “This visibility and engagement makes it easier to give recognition to employees and celebrate wins. Doing these things helps drive our culture and helps our employees know their voices are being heard.”

Once Zinc went live, Vivint Smart Home was able to remove the alternative messaging apps from technicians’ phones, which streamlined application management and improved security. According to Barborka and



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Christensen, the tool was easy to explain, which made training technicians on the new system simple. The Zinc solution is hosted, and the app is available on both the iPads and iPhones the technicians carry. “The deployment was really smooth because the tool is intuitive,” Christensen says. “It really works the same as text messaging, and we focused our training on how to use that in a corporate environment.”

Improving Communications Has Multiple Benefits

Using Zinc, managers can quickly and easily send information to individual technicians or specific groups of technicians. Managers can send out important messages, alerts, or even videos to the mobile workforce on a regular basis. “At headquarters, we are also getting direct, streamlined feedback on how to improve things,” Christensen says. In addition, the technicians can share their location or find other nearby service professionals. “We use these features if someone needs help on the job, or if they are transferring inventory,” he says. “You can take a part over to someone else so they can complete a job.”

The interteam communication feature is also a huge lift for teambuilding and morale. “When a technician completes an install, they can communicate and celebrate by sending messages back and forth with other team members,” Christensen says. “Each team has its own culture and ‘heartbeat,’ so to speak, because they have access to this communication tool.” Eventually, the company hopes to use the system to send weather or traffic alerts to technicians automatically to help them better manage their routes and stay safe.

Technicians can also collaborate using Zinc. “If there is a question or a problem, a technician can take a picture

of the system and send out a message saying, ‘Hey team, I have this issue and need some help. Any thoughts?’ and they get immediate feedback through the forum of the team,” Barborcka says.

When testing new software, products, or processes, Vivint Smart Home can see feedback from technicians through Zinc, which provides more insight into potential issues related to installation or service.

The field services team has improved its training capabilities by using Zinc’s live video and conference calling features. The team also uses Zinc to conduct group question-and-answer sessions with tech support staff.

Better Communication Means More Feedback, Faster Time To Service

Vivint Smart Home has improved employee and customer satisfaction using Zinc. “We have an internal employee satisfaction score we measure every year, and we’ve seen a 50 percent improvement in employee engagement scores since deployment,” Barborcka says. “In talking to the field, we learned there was a variety of factors that contributed to this, but Zinc was a big one.”

The company’s field service net promoter score (NPS), which measures customer satisfaction for installation and service, is now in the 80s, which is one of the best scores in the industry. “The messaging system really helped promote high performance in our teams,” Barborcka says. “We talk about what happened and what we did on-site; if something didn’t go our way, we can discuss that immediately using Zinc.”

The company also has more visibility into the communication habits of the workforce. “We’re starting to correlate performance with those communication habits,” Christensen says. “That’s already having a big impact on

how we develop our workforce. We're gaining all sorts of interesting perspectives and insights by correlating those behaviors. Generally, we see that the folks who have higher communication levels are our higher performers."

The system (along with the other mobile technologies) has also contributed to efficiency increases. "Collectively, we've seen our time to service — the ability to get to the customer quickly when they call — drop by 37 percent in the past year," Barborka says. "We've also seen a reduc-

Plans For Knowledge Management

Vivint Smart Home is working with Zinc to add an archiving feature for technician interactions so that shared knowledge can be accessed later. "If someone has already gone through troubleshooting with an issue in the past, we want to give them a way to find that information themselves before they ping the rest of the team," Christensen says.

The company will also continue correlating performance metrics with communication habits. "Zinc is



tion of 13 percent in service returns or second visits to complete a job." The company has also experienced a 23 percent reduction in returns of installs over the same time period.

With Zinc, the company knows exactly which employees have read each alert and when they read it. "We know that employees are consuming more of these messages, because we are getting more feedback than ever before," Christensen says. "We get a lot more questions, and that gives us a better idea of how well they understood what we were trying to tell them. They get right back to us if they need a clarification. That didn't happen with email."

working with us, and we are bringing ideas to them," Christensen says. "We have a good road map going forward and feel confident that the partnership will put us at the cutting edge of communication."

He adds that the solution has also positively affected Vivint Smart Home's company culture. "The more we can involve technicians in the decision-making process, the better," Christensen says. "Zinc is delivering information instantaneously, and we are getting more feedback. If we're in a bind, we poll the field and ask what they think about it. We make decisions together, from headquarters all the way down to the pros turning the wrenches." ●

Enterprise Communication for Deskless Workers

Infuse your organization with real-time knowledge that drives business results.

Messaging, Voice & Video

Real-time information sharing throughout the organization

Unlock the valuable tribal knowledge in your workforce and connect your employees to the information that will help them deliver results. Zinc offers a full-featured messaging solution including 1:1 & group messaging, voice, video, location & file sharing, with a familiar user experience that ensures wide adoption among both desktop and deskless workers.

Broadcasts

Top-down communication of important or urgent information

Deliver urgent alerts and important company communications to your employees with ease and effectiveness. From safety alerts to learning content to a weekly video from the CEO, Zinc helps you inform your workforce with timely information and effective deliverability. Your deskless teams will feel informed, engaged and connected to your organization.

Workforce Analytics

Visibility to what's really happening in the field

Your mobile team is on the front lines, and no one knows more about what's going on at the point of sale or service than deskless workers. Zinc gives you direct visibility into what's happening in the field so you can take the actions that will drive results.

Security and Compliance

Ensure your private data stays that way

Zinc delivers end-to-end, military-grade encryption, with enterprise controls that ensure your corporate data is secure. Zinc holds current certifications from trusted organizations such as SOC II, FIPS, HIPAA, TRUSTe, and ISO 27001.

66%

Improvement in work efficiency

65%

Increase in visibility into the field

65%

More informed employees

52%

Increase in customer satisfaction

42%

Increase in employee retention

