

Location: Butler County, IA

Product: MAX Call-Taking

Zetron's MAX Call-Taking Integrates 9-1-1 Text and Voice on One Console

The Butler County, Iowa, 9-1-1 center's updated MAX Call-Taking system not only accepts Text-to-9-1-1 messages, but it allows dispatchers to take both text and voice calls on the same console. Other 9-1-1 systems require separate consoles for text and voice.

In early 2016, a news report [7] threw a bright light on the value of Text-to-9-1-1. A deaf woman in Georgia had come upon two children—two and five-years old—alone and locked in a car in a mall parking lot. Unable to make a 9-1-1 voice call, the woman tried texting her local 9-1-1 center. Thanks to the fact that the agency is an early adopter of Text-to-9-1-1 functionality, an operator was able to take the text call and immediately dispatch help to the scene. As a result, the children, who'd been in the car for nearly an hour, were rescued, unharmed.

All was well that ended well. But this incident illustrates why the push is on for public safety answering points (PSAPs) to equip themselves with the next-generation technologies necessary to accept text messages over their emergency 9-1-1 call-taking systems. Texting is an important option not only because it has become an increasingly popular means of communication, but it can be the only viable solution when a caller is hearing or speech impaired or in a situation where it's unsafe to make a voice call. What's more, these technologies are the path to a future that will not only support both text and voice messages, but, eventually, images, video, and other data as well.

That future is rapidly approaching, and Zetron and its reseller, RACOM, are already a part of it. Together, they recently updated the Butler County, Iowa, 9-1-1 center's existing MAX Call-Taking system platform to an integrated solution that accepts Text-to-9-1-1 calls over the area's Emergency Services IP Network (ESInet). A critical feature of MAX Call-Taking is that, unlike other systems that deliver text messages over a separate console, MAX Call-Taking accepts Text-to-9-1-1 messages on the same console as a voice call. This saves space and makes it much easier for call-takers to handle both emergency voice and text calls.

Finding a site

The project began when RACOM decided that, given the current trends in public safety, it would behoove them to implement updated Text-to-9-1-1 functionality on one of their key products, Zetron's MAX Call-Taking system.



They began looking for a PSAP that was already using MAX Call-Taking on Iowa's statewide next-generation network, had a next-generation recorder, and was SIP-enabled. They also sought a relatively small PSAP that did not have heavy call volumes. This would help ensure that if it became necessary to reroute calls to another center, doing so would not overburden the center accepting those calls. Last but not least, the PSAP would have to be willing and able to participate with RACOM and Zetron in the effort. The 9-1-1 center in Butler County, Iowa, met these criteria, point for point. It was chosen for the project.

Project prep

RACOM service manager Clint Schlabaugh explains how they prepared for the updates and testing the project would require. "We staged the solution at our office, adding a single, standalone server to cover the text functionality," he says. "That involved a single-space rack server that houses multiple server modules in a single chassis. They're often used to save space and improve system management. We also upgraded the software of their MAX Call-Taking system."

The server was then put in place at the Butler County 9-1-1 facility. Because the equipment could be integrated simply through standard Ethernet cables, RACOM was able to complete this process quickly. The existing MAX Call-Taking system was updated with another software revision and testing got underway.

Verifying voice and text functionality

They began by verifying the system's ability to take 13 voice calls, then went on to test the new integrated text functionality.

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Jason Johnson
Sheriff, Butler County, IA

“When you take a system that’s on an i3 network and start running it through its paces in a live situation, you can’t be absolutely sure what’s going to happen,” says Schlabaugh. “We tested the solution with five or six major carriers and also checked a range of functions, such as whether multiple calls could be handled simultaneously, and whether a user on a text session is also able to place a voice call. It all went quite smoothly.”

Issues that did surface were minor and had to do with refinements that would help all of the equipment function together. “With Zetron engineers working in tandem at the site and in house, we were able to work efficiently throughout the testing process,” explains Zetron technical support engineer, Cory Coffin. “This, along with our ability to coordinate directly with the text vendor’s technical staff, resulted in a rapid deployment of the refinements necessary to ensure that text delivery was completely successful.”

Meeting the needs of dispatchers

Zetron MAX Call-Taking product manager, Alice Johnson, was on hand at Butler County during the implementation process to help facilitate the center’s transition to the new technology.

“Because I’ve worked as both a dispatcher and an assistant 9-1-1 director,” she says, “I understand the impact change can have on a 9-1-1 center staff. I made it a point to be a voice for the dispatchers and help make sure that their preferences and needs were being communicated and addressed.”

“Alice was great,” says Butler County Sheriff, Jason Johnson. “She helped dispatchers learn how to handle the Text-to-9-1-1 functionality and also served as a liaison between the engineers and dispatchers so we could be sure that the system was set up to be as efficient and effective for them as possible.”

Fully integrated Text-to-9-1-1

As a result of this project, Butler County 9-1-1 is now fully equipped for Text-to-9-1-1 messaging. Plus, their MAX Call-Taking system is able to provide a more streamlined and easy-to-use method for delivering and handling Text to-9-1-1 messages compared to systems that are not ESInet compatible.

“It’s very important to us that our Text-to-9-1-1 functionality is fully integrated onto the MAX Call-Taking console,” says Sheriff Johnson. “We’re very pleased with the system and the avenues of communication it opens up between the public and our dispatchers. It’s much easier to use than other systems, including the technologies those with disabilities have traditionally used to communicate with us. Last but not least, it puts us in a perfect position to handle other kinds of message formats as 9-1-1 capabilities continue to evolve.”

[1] Gaither, Tanita. (2016, Jan 7). Deaf GA woman uses text-to-911, saves 2 kids left in car. Retrieved 2016, Dec. 12 from KCTV5 website: <http://www.kctv5.com/story/30907578/deaf-ga-woman-uses-text-to-911-saves-2-kids-left-in-car>.



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005-7717B February 2017

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