

Utility Case Study: JEA

Persistent connections deliver 30 percent productivity increase. *The eighth-largest community-owned utility in the United States, JEA (formerly known as Jacksonville Electric Authority) provides electricity, water and sewer services to more than 750,000 accounts in northeast Florida. Its 600 field technicians are tightly scheduled, and reliable access to applications is essential to expediting task completion and serving customers responsively. The Mobility XE mobile VPN from NetMotion Wireless is the vital link that maintains data connections to those applications, making workers maximally productive.*

About the Deployment

When problems arise, JEA's field technicians are the first responders for the utility. They are busy year-round, but the urgency goes up several notches during hurricane season. Technicians are called on to handle breaks in water and sewage mains, fix meters, respond to power outages, and turn service on and off. They rely on access to a mix of off-the-shelf and custom software including e-mail, dispatch, CRM and GIS. In addition, electrical service-delivery applications assist in locating equipment, especially underground. With 800 square miles of territory to roam, workers need to connect via multiple cellular carriers to cover the entire service area.

Fewer Connection Hassles, More Working Hours

Before adopting Mobility XE, field workers reported that they were losing valuable time with the wireless system whenever they were forced to switch to a new network. As they drove between locations and experienced connection loss, they had to pull over to the side of the road and log back in to the system. As Bonnie Anderson, JEA systems administrator, explains, "Often, multiple attempts were made until reconnection, a process that could take twenty minutes. Additionally, service operators had to connect to applications via the network, which would also fail when out of range. They would have to reopen applications and retype data that had been lost." This was an unacceptable loss of productivity, not to mention a source of irritation.

After a thorough RFP process, JEA deployed Mobility XE and the problems disappeared. Workers log in one time, at the start of their session, and remain connected throughout the workday with no need to reauthenticate when a connection goes down. Utility workers, construction crew leaders and engineers, as well as some administrators are using Mobility XE. "Maintaining a persistent connection lets JEA workers get more work accomplished and greatly reduces the complexity of mobile computing," summarizes Anderson.

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— **Bonnie Anderson,**
Systems Administrator, JEA



Organization

JEA

Industry

Utility

Objectives

- Eliminate time-consuming user re-authentication
- Maintain continuous connections to data
- Avoid data loss and data re-entry

Solution

- Mobility XE mobile VPN
- Cellular data network access
- Mix of off-the-shelf and custom applications

Results

- 30 percent productivity increase
- More home service completed
- Greater number of trouble tickets resolved

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Exhaustive Evaluation, Clear Conclusion

JEA undertook a thorough process that culminated in the decision to go with Mobility XE. First, they investigated various IPsec and SSL VPN solutions, but the performance was not what they hoped for. They then developed an RFP, to which five companies responded. During evaluation and testing, Mobility XE stood out from the competition on a number of fronts:

Integration. Mobility XE delivered reliable, secure access to all of the applications that JEA field workers needed.

Failover. During the trial, Mobility XE was set up on a pair of servers in order to test its failover capabilities. When one of the servers went down due to hardware failure, the users remained connected and JEA evaluators didn't even notice. It wasn't until they examined the defective server that they realized a seamless server failover had occurred.

Technical support. The NetMotion Wireless support team was knowledgeable, helpful, and above all responsive.

References. A long list of distinguished customers had already put Mobility XE to the test in similar environments.

Greater Productivity, Present and Future

In five years since implementing Mobility XE, JEA has noted a 30% increase in daily productivity for its field workers, more home service completed, and more trouble tickets resolved.

They expect even greater increases in productivity and completion rates as they deploy Smart Grid, a new initiative that uses two-way digital technology to control appliances in consumers' homes. Smart Grid promises to save energy, reduce costs and increase service reliability, and the wireless initiative keyed by Mobility XE is poised to play a leading role in assuring an efficient rollout. As Anderson declares: "Mobility XE is critical to JEA going forward, as well as important to our electrical, water and sewer techs today. They would never let us take the solution away from them."

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