SUNCO

CASE STUDY

Microsoft Teams or Mitel? Foothills County Chose Both

How Foothills County integrated Microsoft Teams with a Mitel subscription to give 130 users more choice, retain existing desk phones and simplify business communications.



130

users on one hybrid Mitel + Teams platform

ABOUT THE CLIENT

23,000+

residents across a growing rural municipality

5

people in the county's IT department

Foothills County begins at the southern edge of Calgary and reaches west toward Kananaskis Country and the Rocky Mountains. For many travellers, the county is the road to the mountains. For the more than 23,000 people who live there, it is a growing rural municipality with deep agricultural roots, surrounding communities such as Okotoks and High River.

Keeping the county connected is the job of a compact IT department of five, with specialists covering software, servers, networking and the help desk. The team focuses on adopting technology that helps the county work efficiently rather than holding on to old processes.

THE CHALLENGE

For years, telecommunications was one of the few parts of the county's operation that had barely changed. The IT team knew the Mitel platform well. They had managed an on-premise system themselves before the county moved to a cloud hosted service with its previous provider, and for a time that arrangement served the county well. Gradually, the service began to slip, and interruptions and outages became a regular part of the workday.

When the provider traced the problems to outdated cloud hardware, the county accepted the diagnosis and signed a new contract to complete an upgrade. The agreement also came with a promise the IT team had been hoping for: staff would be able to make Teams calls through a hybrid Mitel setup. However, service was no better after the upgrade and the hybrid calling never worked. The county was eventually told it would need to choose between Mitel and Teams.

The consequences landed hardest at the front desk. Reception staff relied on an attendant console to run the switchboard, and it was left out of the migration. Once the numbers moved over, reception was expected to manage the county's incoming calls through Teams instead. Efforts to move other users onto soft phones alone met a similar fate, which frustrated the many employees who depended on their desk phones. Buying new hardware to work around the problem was not something the IT team was willing to consider.



> “All of a sudden, we moved numbers, moved things over, and they were expected just to use Teams. It was something they didn't look into, and it didn't go well.”
>
> **Hollis Jacobson**
> Manager of Information Technology, Foothills County

THE SOLUTION

The turning point came at a Municipal Information Systems Association (MISA) conference, where the county's IT team met Sunco. Sunco explained that it supported hybrid Mitel and Teams calling every day. After the experience of the past year, the IT team was not prepared to take that on faith and asked to see it working first.

Sunco ran the demonstration on a live system, and the hybrid performed as described. From there, Sunco moved Foothills County to a Mitel hosted subscription for 130 users, integrated with Microsoft Teams and hosted in Sunco's data centres in Airdrie. Staying with Mitel allowed the county to keep roughly 100 desk phones that were still in good working order. Sunco also completed server enhancements for the county as part of the engagement.

The new system was built around choice. Employees can work from a desk phone, the Mitel MiCollab soft phone or Teams, and a call can find them at their desk, on their cell phone or over video. MiCollab quickly became the favourite among soft phone users. Its scheduling tools let staff turn ring groups on and off, and they can pass a call between their cell phone and desk phone without hanging up.

Two other factors weighed in Sunco's favour. The Airdrie data centres keep the county's communications in Alberta, which matters to an organization that prefers to keep its data local. The same project team also stayed with the county from the first conversation through to completion, something the IT team sees less and less often these days. That continuity has carried into ongoing support, with tickets reaching a technician who already knows the county's environment.

THE OUTCOME

The clearest sign of success is that the complaints have stopped. Staff now use the tools that suit their work, and the IT team estimates that about 80 per cent of soft phone users have settled on MiCollab, with the rest in Teams. Across the county, users are split roughly evenly between desk phones and soft phones.

130	~100	3	100%
users moved to a Mitel hosted subscription with Teams	working desk phones kept in service	ways to take a call: desk phone, MiCollab or Teams	of communications hosted in Alberta

Training from Sunco has given the IT team the confidence to handle user changes on its own. On the rare occasions a brief outage has occurred, Sunco has explained the cause openly. That transparency has gone a long way toward rebuilding the county's trust in its phone system.

The project has reduced costs as well. Teams calling carried a separate charge under the previous arrangement. Sunco's hybrid solution includes Teams licensing, and a single licence covers both MiCollab and Teams. The county pays once, never has to decide in advance how many seats each platform needs, and lets users choose the soft phone they prefer. Keeping about 100 working desk phones in service also spared the county the capital cost of a large hardware refresh.

The relationship has since grown beyond the county's own phones. Foothills Fibre, the county's fibre service, moved from its previous SIP provider to Sunco Cloud and now resells it to its customers, giving them access to features they never had before. The team is also working on an advanced package that adds a Sunco Cloud soft phone option. Asked what advice to pass on to a neighbouring municipality, Jacobsen kept it simple:

> “I would tell them that they can trust Sunco to look after their phone systems. I can just talk to the Sunco team, tell them what I'm thinking or what I need, and I don't have to go out and try to design it myself.”
>
> *Hollis Jacobson*
> *Manager of Information Technology, Foothills County*

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