



## Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service offices improve their telecommunications with TalkSwitch

### Background

Clemson University is part of the largest educational delivery system in the world, the Land Grant University system. Founded in 1889 as a technical and scientific institution, Clemson is a prestigious Doctoral/Research University with more than 16,000 students and 46 county extension offices scattered throughout South Carolina.

### The challenge

The Clemson county extension offices each had 2 to 20 staff members and aging, discontinued phone systems with no voicemail, customizable call routing options or remote extension capabilities. Ken Pruitt, Director of IT Planning for all Public Service Activities and the College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Life Sciences, and Jerry Beckley, Information Technology Specialist with Extension Field Operations at Clemson, needed a system that would standardize call handling across the entire extension service. They wanted a system with rich features that could be affordably deployed in every office and be configured and managed remotely. They also wanted something that could be expanded and upgraded easily.

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### Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service at a glance

#### The challenge

Outfit multiple locations with easy-to-deploy, centrally manageable system with voicemail, auto attendants and remote extension capabilities.

#### The solution

65 TalkSwitch 48-CAs and 70 TS-100 telephones.

**Location:** 46 county offices throughout South Carolina

**Employees:** 2 to 20 per office

**Established:** 1889

[www.clemson.edu](http://www.clemson.edu)

### The solution

The Chief Operating Officer of Extension established a committee to assess the telecommunications needs of the organization. After receiving input from field personnel, Pruitt and Beckley launched a comprehensive six-month review of telephone systems. Beckley tried a variety of solutions without success, before installing a TalkSwitch 48-CA in one of his offices. He began to put the system through its paces. The combination of features, flexibility, and the ability to use non-proprietary telephones with the system quickly won him over.

“The flexibility of the system is just too good to be true,” he says. “We had a number of criteria that we needed a phone system to meet. TalkSwitch was the only one that met those criteria within our budget. It’s exceeded anything I could possibly have imagined.”

Pruitt and Beckley presented the TalkSwitch solution to the COO and state regional directors, and were quickly given approval to purchase 65 4-line/8-extension TalkSwitch 48-CAs and 70 TS100 telephones for deployment across the Cooperative Extension Service offices.

TalkSwitch has had an immediate impact on the organization, even though the Field Operations I.T. group hasn’t finished installing the system in each of the county offices.

### **Auto attendants and voicemail**

Field Operations standardized the way incoming calls were answered in all of the offices by loading the same professionally recorded Auto Attendant greeting onto each system. And for the first time, Voicemail was available for each staff member.

“Our administrative assistants used to complain that they spent their whole day taking messages,” says Beckley. “TalkSwitch’s built-in voicemail has eliminated that problem, freeing them up to do their jobs more efficiently.”

Beckley also set up the TalkSwitch auto attendant and remote extension capabilities to free the staff from answering the same questions over and over on the phone. He started by asking them what questions were asked most often.

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“The two they got the most were requests for the number of the Home and Garden Information Center. The second one was how to take a soil sample from your property to bring in for analysis. So what we did was take one of the general Voicemail accounts and turned it into an audio instruction sheet. We have a nice, professionally done recording of how to take a soil sample, and the great thing is that it’s consistent throughout the state.”

The recording saves time, but it also improves the soil samples themselves, Beckley says.

### **Remote extensions**

The TalkSwitch Remote Extension capabilities also allow the extension offices to seamlessly connect to other offices. “By using the Remote Extension function, many of our counties can transfer callers to the Home and Garden Information Center without our clientele having to hang up and redial. They can even select to be transferred automatically from the main menu and never speak to anyone in the office.”

The Cooperative Extension Service also uses Remote Extensions to keep mobile staff in touch. They have a three-person IT staff with 46 county offices to cover, so they’re seldom at their desks. It’s critical that they remain accessible, though. With TalkSwitch, the IT staff, as well as mobile County Extension Agents, can have incoming calls automatically routed to their cell phones. The transfer is completely seamless and invisible to the caller.

### **Remote configurability**

With its previous telephone system, Field Operations IT staff was forced to travel to each extension office when a change needed to be made to the system, or call in an expensive technician to do the job. With TalkSwitch, the system can be configured, altered and managed from a central location using the Internet.

“I can do it all sitting right here in my office,” Beckley says. “As a matter of fact, just this morning I had to change part of the configuration in an office that’s about 100 miles away. I connected to the Talkswitch via the network, changed it and that was it. That’s flexibility you can’t get with any of the other systems I looked at or read about.”

### Phone freedom

With their old phone systems, the offices were tied to proprietary telephones that were expensive and didn't work with anything else. Worse, because the system was discontinued, they were forced to shuffle working phones from office to office when phones broke down. They didn't want to fall into that trap again.

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TalkSwitch is designed to work with any corded or cordless analog telephone, so Clemson Cooperative Extension has a lot more freedom and flexibility in setting up and maintaining the system. “Now if a phone goes out in one of the offices, I don't have to take phones from another office, I just tell them to go to Radio Shack or Wal-Mart and buy any phone that has a flash button on it,” he says.

### Upgradeability

TalkSwitch is designed to grow and expand with a customer, so adding on to the system is a snap. It also provides a smooth migration path to Voice over IP. “VoIP is something we want to end up doing in our organization,” says Beckley. “With TalkSwitch it's not a big deal to make that move. We're putting in the broadband infrastructure, so we're almost ready for it. It's definitely something we're looking forward to testing out.”

### Results

By switching to TalkSwitch, the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service was able to:

- Improve office efficiency by freeing administrative assistants to do their jobs, rather than spending the day taking messages and routing calls;
- Improve customer service, ensuring consistent call handling and information delivery across the network;
- Save money by doing installations and changes themselves, rather than relying on expensive technicians;
- Save time by handling configuration remotely, rather than traveling to each site for every change;
- Increase flexibility and save money by being able to use any analog telephone set;
- Develop a smooth migration path to Voice over IP;
- Deliver individual Voicemail accounts for each office staff member;
- Ensure traveling staff are always accessible by configuring their cell phones as remote extensions;
- Transfer calls between offices by dialing a 3-digit extension number;
- Offer a range of telephone features that were previously not available to their users.

#### About TalkSwitch

TalkSwitch® designs and develops award-winning phone systems for small, multi-location and franchise businesses. Since its establishment in 1990, TalkSwitch has dedicated itself to developing PBXs and IP PBXs that tens of thousands of small businesses across North America rely on. With a growing global network of resellers, distributors and partners, TalkSwitch phones and phone systems are changing the way small businesses communicate. For more information, please visit our website at [www.talkswitch.com](http://www.talkswitch.com), or call us toll-free in the United States and Canada at 1.888.332.9322. In all other markets call +1.613.725.2980.

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