



Vidyo[®]
Personal Telepresence

CUSTOMER PROFILE

**The Columbia Regional Geospatial Service
Center System at Stephen F. Austin State
University**

www.vidyo.com
1.866.99.VIDYO

© 2009 Vidyo, Inc. All rights reserved. Vidyo is a registered trademark and VidyoConferencing, VidyoDesktop, VidyoGateway, VidyoPortal, VidyoProxy, VidyoRoom, VidyoRouter and VidyoTechnology are trademarks of Vidyo, Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. All specifications subject to change without notice, system specifics may vary.

CP_0709_SFAU_US



VidyoConferencing™ at Stephen F. Austin State University

The Columbia Regional Geospatial Service Center System is a federally funded initiative of the Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. Its mandate is to provide regional geospatial support for emergency planning and response, economic development, and natural resource management. At present, the System consists of 4 regional sites geographically dispersed throughout Texas: Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, The University of Texas at El Paso, Texas Tech University in Lubbock and Lamar University in Beaumont. The hub of the system is at the Texas Natural Resources Information System (TNRIS) in Austin. The locations are connected by Internet 2 providing high speed communications between all facilities.

Obviously, communication is of critical importance for an operation whose success is essential to citizens of various Texas communities, and beyond. "Lots of people depend on our ability to deliver emergency support for local and regional communities," said P.R. Blackwell, Director, Columbia Regional Geospatial Service Center. "Our response to emergency situations has to be organized and timely. VidyoConferencing allows us to have real time, efficient communication with our geographically dispersed partners.

In the past, the group used what was most readily available to them -- the telecommunications services of Texas Tech University that hosted H.323 video conferencing sessions. According to Blackwell, the system worked adequately, but the necessity of scheduling conferences in advance and the dependence on an outside organization to host the sessions were problematic. The Center began looking for a solution that would better meet their needs. Specifically, there were several key criteria: They needed a video conferencing system that allowed spontaneous point-to-point and group interaction; a solution that could penetrate firewalls without interaction with their partners network administrators; a system that they could configure and control without dependence on another organization for scheduling or maintenance and lastly, but of great importance, a system that was "easy on the budget."



The Columbia Center uses VidyoConferencing to extend training sessions to partners across the state of Texas

VidyoConferencing: The Perfect Solution

"With the Vidyo system, the hardware cost is modest and the recurring licensing fee is at a price point that we can afford," said Blackwell. "It's vastly better than having to pay \$100K - \$200K for an MCU plus all the other equipment that is required with other systems. Plus, with VidyoConferencing, we own the system; we were able to install it in our cold room where we have complete control. Since our organization is the sole user of the system, we can instigate casual one-to-one conversations or hold ad hoc multi-participant meetings 'on the fly,' without having to deal with scheduling and coordinating with outside agencies."

The Columbia Regional Geospatial Service Center group holds weekly coordination meetings via VidyoConferencing, typically with 10 participants. They also use Vidyo for daily impromptu meetings between smaller parties or for point-to-point communication. P.R.

Blackwell remembers, not so long ago, when a huge amount of time, travel and money was a given for the necessary "in-person" meetings.

"That's how I originally became an advocate for video conferencing. It's frustrating to spend so much time on the road for meetings," said Blackwell. Now he meets regularly with Center partners in El Paso - which is over 800 miles to the west of Nacogdoches, Austin - which is a 4 ½ hour drive away, and Lubbock - over 500 miles away.



PR Blackwell briefs Columbia Center System participants on the status of Hurricane Gustav via VidyoConferencing.

The Center has recently needed to activate the system several times because of impending emergency situations. According to Blackwell, "So far the 2008 Hurricane Season has presented two storms that were a serious threat to areas in Texas - Hurricanes Dolly and Edouard. Although the severity of the storms was less than anticipated in both cases, it was a good opportunity to see how VidyoConferencing would work in an emergency. As we had hoped, it worked wonderfully. We were able to easily communicate with our partners across the state to strategize and coordinate our response. It was great practice. We're now more confident in our ability to deal with future hurricanes and emergency events."

Blackwell claims that although they've never had bandwidth issues (since there are dedicated network lines that connect their centers), the video quality of their conferences has improved with using Vidyo. In addition, with Vidyo, since the number of simultaneous ports that can be used is now simply a matter of licensing, their Vidyo system can be expanded over time without having to replace any hardware. One important scenario that Blackwell discussed with Vidyo, was the ability to increase their port licenses "on the fly" in a case of an emergency. Vidyo's solution is the only truly scalable software bridge that supports essential features such as rate matching and continuous presence. This unique architecture can allow

additional ports to “emailed” to the field, with very little prior notice. This ability gives the Center the advantage of a much larger system without the upfront cost and is simply not possible using hardware MCUs.

In addition to primary communications between partners, the Center will use the system for other collaborations as well. They are currently engaged in projects with several state agencies and collaborative research with various Universities across the United States and overseas. They are now able to replace what they’ve used up until now – telephone conferences, Skype communications, and H.323 video conferences – with their new Vidyo system. Blackwell claims that the low cost (other than a Web cam and headset) client model makes this possible for them. Since they can underwrite the client license fees, they can make the service available to their collaborators for very little out of pocket expense.

According to Blackwell, the Center’s search for an ideal video conferencing system had been going on for a quite some time. The Vidyo Conferencing system was the first that they came across that met their various needs at a price point that they could afford. They are extremely satisfied with the results.



Charles Ashton, Columbia Center Geospatial Trainer discusses National Weather Service on-line tools for GIS during a Columbia Center System coordination Vidyo session.

For more information: www.vidyo.com/1.866.99.VIDYO