

# NDGI Finds Dollars & Sense in VoIP System

## Service as Simple as One, Two, Three...

Kia Mikesch isn't only interested in making a great first impression.

As the vice president of North Dakota Grain Inspection Service, she wants the second, third, fourth – in fact, every single contact – to be stellar. It's basic customer service, she says, and in the grain inspection business, it's all about the phone call.

NDGI has 250 employees working with commodity growers, elevators, processors, merchandisers and buyers across nine states. That's a lot of phones, not to mention hundreds of calls to and from the corporate office in Fargo, N.D., four regional offices, dozens of rural locations and half a dozen mobile labs every single day.

It also has meant more telecommunications companies, service contracts and costs than any business would ever want to deal with, along with less-than-stellar connectivity between NDGI offices and employees.

## Quality on the Line

NDGI inspects and certifies agricultural products for growers, elevators, merchandisers and processors in North Dakota, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Ohio and South Dakota.

The company samples and grades grain to help farmers make decisions about their crops and certify the quality of grains for buyers and sellers. NDGI is the only federally licensed inspection agency in the areas it serves, and its work affects people and companies up and down the agricultural supply chain.

Exemplary service has been an NDGI hallmark since its founding in 1968. But with the addition of more offices, more employees and more customers in recent years, the ability to maintain the level of service into the future was coming into question.

"We're not an industry that people automatically understand," Mikesch said. "It's not intuitive when it comes to which office someone should call, what they should ask for or what services are available at each of our locations. We needed to simplify things for our customers and our employees."

The answer was a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) system from True|IT.



**Kia Mikesch, NDGI Vice President**



"Your Official Inspection Service"

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*– Kia Mikesch, Vice President*

## NDGI, Meet VoIP

VoIP systems combine telephone service and the Internet for seamless communications through desktop computers, landlines, laptops and handheld devices. They make it easy to link multiple locations, connect mobile devices for remote work and smoothly transfer calls between offices in different states and regions. Since everything travels over the Internet, VoIP systems also make it possible to communicate with employees in areas where wireless signals are unavailable.

In other words, VoIP was the ideal solution for NDGI.

"We've been wanting a VoIP system for a long time, but they were always too expensive," Mikesh said. "We were surprised at how reasonable True|IT's quote was, and when we factored in how it was going to enhance everything from customer service to employee efficiency, it was a no-brainer."

On top of that, True|IT promised to get the system up and running and train employees within a few weeks, just in time to incorporate offices from a grain inspection agency NDGI had recently purchased in Ohio.

## Keeping It Simple

To get an idea of how complicated NDGI's phone service was before, consider North Dakota. The company was dealing with and paying bills from six separate phone companies in that state alone. The situation was similar across its footprint, with different capabilities, fees and limitations for every provider.

With the VoIP system, NDGI was able to "port," or move, the numbers it had through most of its providers to just one telecommunications company. NDGI's offices retained the same numbers so there was no confusing changeover or disruption for customers.

The new system has significantly reduced NDGI's expenses. For example, locations in Illinois whose phone numbers have been ported to Fargo now cost NDGI less than \$2 a month compared to the \$250/month it was paying before. When you're talking dozens of phone numbers, that's huge.

True|IT's commitment to getting everything ready in Ohio was big, too. It saved NDGI the significant one-time cost of a phone system for its new Ohio offices, and the company isn't paying \$500 per month in ongoing fees.

Several unquantifiables have been just as significant.

The system is completely customizable from office to office and user to user. Different employees can use different types of phones, depending on their needs. A "whisper" mode allows trainers to listen in on conversations between customers and new receptionists/data entry personnel and offer suggestions without the customer hearing. And the system records all conversations so employees can go back and review what a customer said if necessary.



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**– Kia Mikesh, Vice President**

## Service. Right Now.

Most importantly, Mikesh said, "You can act like the people in our other offices, across the company, are sitting right next to you. I can buzz someone and transfer a call anywhere. Customers can't tell, and we can connect them with the right people right away."

Whether it's the first call, the second, third, fourth...

"It's saving us time and money, and it's making everything easier," Mikesh said. "There literally is not one thing I'd change about the phone system, how True|IT implemented it for us or how they work with us every day."