American Electric Power empowers workers by extending SharePoint to the field

American Electric Power is one of the largest electric utilities in the US, with nearly 18,000 employees serving nearly 5.4 million customers across 11 states. The company owns more electricity transmission lines than any other US provider, with a transmission network spanning 40,000 miles.

In 2013, the transmission field services business unit decided it needed more from its SharePoint™ site to communicate with field technicians. The site had about 50 people using it primarily as a virtual bulletin board, accessible only from the company's laptops and work stations.

Using Infragistics SharePlus Enterprise, AEP has been able to extend the reach of SharePoint to workers in the field and create a communication and collaboration tool that spans the company's vast footprint.

SharePlus is a mobile collaboration solution that transforms how teams work through instant content discovery, content sharing and data visualization — with or without connectivity. The app empowers on-the-go mobile teams and organizations to work together and achieve more by integrating today's most popular on-premise and cloud-based content and data sources into one seamless experience.

Today, the SharePoint site attracts more than 400 daily visitors. It has become a source for communications with field staff.

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> Al Taylor, Transmission Field Services Work Scheduling and Technology Support Manager

The power of mobility

Al Taylor, Transmission Field Services Work Scheduling and Technology Support Manager, is in charge of the technology supporting field services for AEP's transmission business unit. His team supports roughly 1,400 employees who build, install, inspect and maintain the company's infrastructure.

Recognizing that people consume information differently in the field than they do in the office, Taylor's team wanted to transform the company's SharePoint site into a more effective means of warehousing information for field services staff, and make it better as a communications tool to keep everyone up to date.

The solution had to make it easy for technicians to find what they need quickly and pull it up from anywhere. And since electrical facilities are often in remote locations with spotty cellular connections, the capability to sync the information while connected and then retrieve it even if connectivity is lost was an important consideration. So too was the ability to visualize data and provide reports back to management.

After identifying SharePlus, the company ran a pilot with 40 people.

"We saw the power of using smart devices to provide relevant, updated information that is easy to find," Taylor says. "We wanted to enable our field services organization to connect and access the information they need, so they can stay in the field as much as possible to get work done."

Soon after, Taylor's team rolled SharePlus out with 1,000 initial licenses. Today the SharePoint site provides access to service manuals, technical diagrams, bulletins from vendors and other resources that field technicians formerly had to retrieve from service centers, all from their smart devices.

"We provide policies, procedures, standards on how things need to be assembled, processed, or even inspected," he says. "Whether they're working in Texas, West Virginia or Michigan, we can make sure that our employees have access to the same information on smart devices."

A boundless resource

One of the SharePoint's primary resources is its asset library. It's an important archive in part because of AEP's long history as an electrical provider — some of the equipment the company maintains has been in service for decades. Over the years as people have retired and service centers have changed locations, it's become more and more challenging to keep track of information for this equipment.

"One of the things that we've focused on with our asset library is getting those manuals and other documentation on our SharePoint so that it's available to anyone who might have that particular equipment in their service area," Taylor says.

Vendors frequently send updates on new maintenance requirements or repair concerns, all of which can now be communicated seamlessly with field staff.
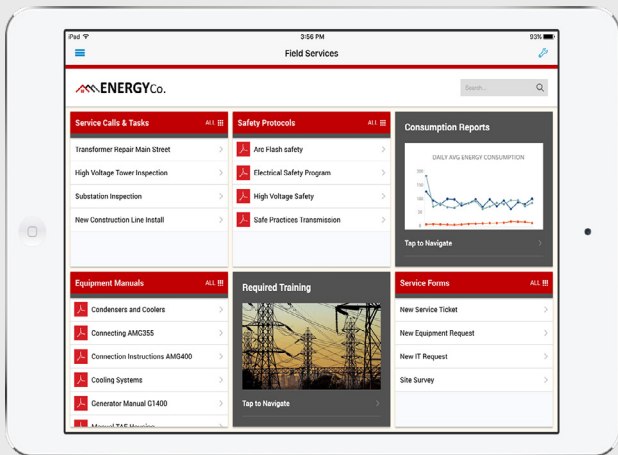
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Collaboration and coordination

What happens when something does go wrong? With hundreds of technicians across 11 states, it's not always easy to pick the brain of an experienced veteran to figure out a difficult repair. But SharePlus' support for high resolution photos and videos is helping technicians collaborate.

Previously if there was a catastrophic failure of equipment, an employee might have used their camera phone— or even sketched the problem out— and sent their questions via email.

Now, technicians can upload pictures and video directly to SharePoint with 1080p resolution, promoting better quality information and information exchange.

"They say a picture is worth a thousand words," says Taylor. "If we have an issue, we can have a picture and GPS coordinates of the problem, and different groups are able to collaborate to solve it."

Check out these demos to learn more about how SharePlus Enterprise helps you find all your content, wherever it resides and supports mobile team collaboration. Then try SharePlus Enterprise free for 30 days to see the difference it can make for your business.

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About Infragistics

Infragistics is a worldwide leader in providing tools and solutions to accelerate application design and development, insights and collaboration for any organization. More than two million developers use Infragistics enterprise-ready UX and UI toolkits to rapidly prototype and build high-performing applications for the Cloud, Web, Windows, iOS and Android devices. Infragistics Enterprise Mobility solutions ReportPlus and SharePlus, give business users the latest advancements in self-service business intelligence and collaboration software. Additionally, Infragistics offers expert UX Services and award-winning support.

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