



## Communications services firm turns growth challenges into opportunities.

After 20 years of steady growth, ComNet felt the pain of antiquated business processes and systems. The company knew that the only way to find relief was to implement a modern and reliable system for electronic time tracking that could integrate seamlessly with its back office systems.



### At a Glance.

Xora helps ComNet's employees in the field – and in the home office – stay productive.

- All of ComNet's employees log their time electronically – office workers in a custom payroll portal and field workers through their mobile phones.
- Time tracking alerts let managers know if employees slip into overtime, staying ahead of cost overrun issues.
- Real-time location alerts inform managers when an employee is speeding, lowering insurance costs and improving workers safety.
- Detailed real-time reports help ComNet managers allocate resources and monitor profitability of individual jobs, and make mid course corrections if necessary.

ComNet's state-of-the-art infrastructure services help customers stay connected and productive; Xora helps ComNet do the same

Many businesses are rebuilding revenue streams after a few rough years, but ComNet Communications has been growing steadily as if the recession never happened. The Bethel, Connecticut-based company – which provides communication cabling and network services to the Fortune 500 – managed to avoid layoffs even as the economy sputtered.

In fact, ComNet has been growing steadily for more than 20 years, says Tina Merrifield, Network Administrator for ComNet. "Information technology is something everyone needs."

Merrifield oversees the company's entire network, including telephony equipment

and computers. Since she joined the company 16 years ago, ComNet's revenues have grown from about \$20 million to \$60 million today serving customers such as IBM, ESPN and MetLife. The company prides itself on delivering a single-source solution for networking and communications, even encompassing wireless access and security cameras.

Growth ensures healthy job security for ComNet's permanent workforce of 250 people, which can expand to up to 500 as projects demand. Even as the company has grown, however, it has maintained excellent benefits and a collaborative culture that keeps turnover low. "I love working for ComNet," says Merrifield. "It's a very tight-knit family atmosphere."

In 2009, ComNet began to experience growing pains around paperwork and



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**Tina Merrifield**

Network Administrator, ComNet Communications

business processes. The company had doubled its business since 2003, and its field staff had increased from 75 to 175. Every week, supervisors, cable installers, network technicians and other field workers would fax timesheets into one of four field offices around the country. As headcount grew, office workers struggled to sort through stacks of paper and enter all the data quickly and accurately into a Sage Timberline payroll system. “Dealing with all that paper became a nightmare,” Merrifield says.

Another problem was that employees didn’t always have easy access to a fax machine at a job site, which sometimes resulted in missed weekly deadlines to report hours. In other cases, timecards were not legible. And there was also no reliable way to verify that the information logged was accurate. “We knew this was an antiquated system,” says Merrifield.

### **Taking the pain out of payroll**

ComNet shopped around for a mobile solution for time tracking. After reviewing several vendors, the company selected Xora, primarily based on a recommendation from its wireless provider. “We liked Xora the best because of the user interface on the management console and because it had uses beyond time tracking,” Merrifield says.

For example, the Xora mobile enterprise solution, consisting of a mobile app that can be downloaded on workers’ mobile devices and a web-based management console for managers, was appealing for benefits such as real-time tracking of workers’ locations in the field and displaying them using Google Maps. “If a project popped up last minute, we can see who could get there quickly,” says Merrifield. “It was a product we knew we could grow into in time.”

To deploy Xora, ComNet built a custom

payroll portal that integrated Xora with its payroll system, and worked on helping employees transition to the new payroll processes. “Looking back, the challenges were minimal and Xora’s technology staff was great in helping us customize the system for our needs,” Merrifield says.

Today, all of the company’s payroll data is visible on the payroll site supported by Xora. Office workers go to the site directly to enter their weekly hours, while field workers use their phones to clock in and out of jobs. The mobile app transmits the data wirelessly to Xora. Every Monday, project managers log into Xora to review and approve the field workers’ hours. In addition, ComNet has set up alerts to inform managers when a technician goes over a certain number of hours, helping staff stay ahead of potential overtime issues or data accuracy problems.

“We know we have hit the ROI for Xora,” Merrifield says. “One of the top benefits is that we can see where our people are at any time. This cuts down on overtime and clears up any questions from a customer or manager about employee location.”

In the office, accountants and project managers can now spend their time at the payroll portal verifying job data and correcting any errors, instead of entering data. This leads to cleaner invoicing and faster receivables.

### **Precise project management**

An unexpected benefit of Xora is that ComNet managers have a better handle on resource allocation for existing and future projects. For instance, a project manager can analyze payroll data against deliverables to see if a project is making money, if the budget is on track, or if he needs additional manpower to finish a job on time. The project manager can investigate why a particular task is taking

too long, or receive alerts if employees arrive late to a job. Conversely, the data can indicate the shining stars on the team. Highly efficient workers can be assigned strategically to help boost the performance of a project that is running behind schedule, for instance.

ComNet also uses Xora to help manage costly resources, such as the fiber optic testers that its technicians use at the end of a project. In the past, manually tracking the location of the tester through spreadsheets was never effective. Now, Merrifield says the project managers rely on an alert she set up on the fiber optic technicians’ phones, asking for the location of the tester. This avoids a wild goose chase for the critical testing device.

### **Maintaining worker safety**

Xora has also helped ComNet with worker safety. When ComNet first deployed Xora, the company set up alerts to notify supervisors when a technician was speeding. The alert would also show up on the technician’s phone, which has quickly helped enforce safe driving behavior of employees using company vehicles. Clean driving records are also critical to avoid hikes in ComNet’s auto insurance, according to Merrifield, and today, there are few instances of speeding.

The company also created an injury form in Xora, so that technicians can notify Human Resources through a form on the phone if they are injured during the day. That helps ensure a paper trail of the incident for clinicians, workers compensation and payroll.

All these uses of Xora have helped ComNet in its drive to stay ahead of growth. “Once we all got on board in early 2010, it was very natural and seamless. The fact that we can log in from any PC anywhere and see hours for every single person in the company, and their location too, has been wonderful.”