

8x8 Brings Business VoIP Phone Service to Senior Community Offices

Thrive Senior Living, developer and owner/operator of technology-enabled housing communities for a new, tech-savvy generation of seniors



Nobody is more aware of the changes that today's seniors are undergoing than Thrive Senior Living. Founded in 2006 and headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, Thrive is developing 11 senior living communities in Georgia, Florida, Louisiana and Texas. But the company doesn't build traditional "assisted living" facilities; it develops state-of-the-art communities designed to keep pace with changing technology—answering the demands of an increasingly social, tech-savvy generation.

Today's Seniors Defy Old Stereotypes, Embrace Social Media

"Many people assume that seniors aren't interested in technology like social media," explains Thrive President Tod Petty. "The typical senior community just has Wi-Fi broadcasting in the lobby and a residential router in the back of the building. At Thrive, we don't accept this type of old-school thinking. We want seniors to participate in the social media revolution, and use technology to stay close to friends and family. Involving seniors begins to change their outlook on the 'sunset' of their life."

And by building in the necessary IT infrastructure as the buildings go up, Thrive ensures that its senior living communities can grow along with the latest technology. "By building in the bandwidth we need up front, we increase our asset's value and avoid the cost of expensive retrofits later," says Petty.

A Technology Vision for Senior Living Communities

Cutting through stereotypes to offer in-demand IT capabilities has become a signature selling point for the company. Thrive has turned to voice-over-IP (VoIP) communications provider 8x8 to help it manage its efforts to become a leader in providing communities that let seniors stay as connected and active as they want.



Customer: Thrive Senior Living

8x8 Partner: Tazergy, Inc.

Locations: 15 senior living communities in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia

Industry: Healthcare, hospitality, senior living

Products: 8x8 Virtual Office

Number of Lines: 180

Vendor Replaced: Fonality

Reasons for Choosing 8x8:

- Mobility
- Easy administration
- Cost savings

Favorite Features:

- Extension dialing
- Virtual numbers
- Mobile app

Website: www.thrivesl.com



“8x8 is a great example of leading-edge business VoIP technology. I can pick up my office phone in Georgia, dial four digits, and be connected to one of our communities in Texas. If I need to move a phone, I just unplug the cable and then plug it back in at the new location and it works!”

—Tod Petty, President,
Thrive Senior Living

Over the years, Thrive has worked with a number of IT consultants to design the infrastructure for its buildings, but Petty notes that some of these engagements have not panned out.

“IT consultants sometimes get stuck and recommend technology they’re comfortable with, rather than what’s best for the community. Instead of leading us forward, they lagged behind our IT vision.”

That situation was remedied in 2012, when Thrive’s new vice president of operations, John Elliston, referred the company to Tazergy, a consulting group specializing in one-source, low-voltage solutions. Tazergy President and CEO Matt Haywood immediately understood Thrive’s technology vision for its senior living communities, and the two companies began a close collaboration.

8x8 Comes Through with Flexibility and Features

Haywood started by reviewing Thrive’s technology specs for two new communities that were being developed in Texas. One thing immediately caught his eye: the company’s VoIP telephony provider was not 8x8, a red flag to the technology veteran.

“As an IT consultant, I try to stay open-minded about clients’ technology choices,” says Haywood. “I wanted to give the other VoIP phone system a fair try.”

But it soon became apparent that Haywood’s concerns were well-founded. The non-8x8 phone system did not provide the functionality that Thrive requires for its multi-state offices.

“8x8 offers a mobile app for iPhones, iPads and Androids, as well as built-in conferencing features,” explains Haywood. “The other system does not, and it was too limiting for us.”

8x8 Was Worth the Switch

But there was another problem: Thrive already had a one-year contract in place with its installed VoIP phone system provider. After some discussion, Haywood and Petty took the extraordinary step of deploying the 8x8 cloud VoIP solution anyway, and then running the two phone systems concurrently.

“There was some added expense in paying for two phone systems,” acknowledges Petty, “but 8x8 is a low-cost, upfront investment. It was worth paying 8x8 on top of our current provider to get the features we need now.”

Moving Phones—Just Plug Them in at New Locations

Thrive installed 8x8 Virtual Office Pro at its corporate headquarters in Atlanta, and 8x8 Virtual Office at its community offices. Right away, Petty and his team noticed the improved functionality.

“8x8 is a great example of leading-edge business VoIP technology,” says Petty. “I can pick up my office phone in Georgia, dial four digits, and be connected to one of our offices in Texas. If I need to move a phone, I just unplug the cable, then plug it back in at the new location, and it works!”

Dispersed, Mobile Teams Work as One

Easy extension dialing and corporate directories for each community are more than just a convenience for Thrive employees. According to Petty, they have also helped with team building throughout the company.

Mobile App Turns Devices into 8x8 Extensions

8x8's mobile app for iOS and Android devices has also come in handy. As a frequent traveler, Petty often uses the app to make and receive business calls on his iPhone and his iPad. Recently, Petty left his iPhone behind in an airline terminal. Fortunately, he had his iPad with him as well. Thinking quickly, Petty used the Apple "Find My Phone" app on his iPad to lock the iPhone and send it a message asking whoever found the phone to call his 8x8 Virtual Office number. Within minutes, airport security called his business number. Petty answered on his iPad and was quickly reunited with his phone.

"My whole life is on my iPhone—contacts, schedule, you name it," says Petty. "Thanks to 8x8 turning my iPad into an extra business phone, I was able to find it in just a few minutes. I'm sure I looked funny walking around the airport talking into my iPad, but 8x8's mobile app really saved the day."

As heavy smartphone users, both Petty and Haywood appreciate the value of the mobile app. Haywood uses the app on his Galaxy S3 smartphone. Petty often uses his iPad for longer conference calls when his iPhone needs to recharge. In fact, Petty now generally prefers using his iPad for phone meetings.

"Being able to reach someone by dialing their extension means they are just four digits away. That accessibility creates close connections between headquarters and our community offices."

8x8 Virtual Office Meetings web conferencing is another popular feature at Thrive. Employees at Thrive's Atlanta headquarters, where Virtual Office Pro is installed, can schedule web meetings from their browser or directly from Outlook using 8x8's free downloadable plugin.

Virtual Numbers Cut Costs and Streamline Sales Cycles

In addition to providing advanced VoIP features, 8x8 has significantly reduced Thrive's telephony costs, and streamlined the sales cycle for its communities. Whenever Thrive begins a new development, the company opens a temporary sales office inside a trailer, and starts the pre-sales process by distributing flyers and displaying billboards with a unique telephone number dedicated to those leads. In the past, the company had to purchase and install expensive premises-based phone systems for its temporary offices in order to hook up actual analog lines. Then Thrive had to wait for the phone company to assign new phone numbers.

Immediate Phone Service for New Offices

With 8x8, the wait—and expense—are over. Now when Thrive opens a new temporary sales office, 8x8 can immediately assign a new virtual number for sales leads. Other than an Internet connection, no other equipment needs to be installed. The virtual number appears on the company's pre-sales literature and billboards. Initially it goes to a dedicated voicemail box, where leads are captured for later follow up. When the active sales cycle kicks off, the number is reassigned to a ring group for live answering by a Thrive representative.

Savings: \$10-15K per Community

Haywood estimates that 8x8 phone service saves Thrive \$10K to \$15K per community in reduced telephony expenses.

"We used to spend about \$5-7K just for the phone system for each temporary sales trailer, and then much more to get the community's phone system up and running," he says. "With 8x8 cloud VoIP, there is no complex on-site PBX equipment, or the extensive labor, installation and ongoing support fees that come with it. We can even move the phones from the temporary trailer to the new community once it's ready. It's been a huge savings for us."

Better Control of the Sales Process

Petty also pointed out 8x8's positive impact on the company's sales cycle.

"It's essential that we capture phone calls from leads early in the sales process. We need that control, and 8x8 gives it to us. We can reserve and advertise virtual numbers as soon as we're ready to go, and record customized greetings for the voicemail boxes. When we're ready to start taking live calls, I just contact Tazergy, and they move the virtual number into a ring group that day. The whole process is much easier than before, and we no longer have to rely on the phone company."



8x8 cloud VoIP phone service has basically eliminated the back-end equipment costs, not to mention labor, installation and support costs. It's been a huge savings for us.

—Matt Haywood, President and CEO, Tazergy, Inc.



Easy Administration Saves Time, Improves Customer Service

Both Petty and Haywood are fans of 8x8's simplified approach to system changes, which Tazergy manages as part of its IT consulting services.

"In the past it was difficult to make changes to the phone system," recalls Petty. "I'd have to call my IT consultant, and sometimes that call would take a couple of hours. With 8x8, all I have to do is send Matt one email, and the change is done that day."

Haywood echoes Petty's sentiments. "The original VoIP provider has a system admin panel that is piecemeal and very difficult to use, he says. "8x8's [administration] panel is simple, reliable, and works great. All we need is a web browser to log in, and we can make changes right on the spot. It allows us to provide better customer service to clients like Thrive, and reduces their consulting fees."

Thrive Employees Love Ease of Use

Haywood notes that Thrive employees also benefit from 8x8's ease of use.

"Our users don't have to dial 8 or 9 to place an outside call; they can just dial a 4-digit extension. The system displays all incoming calls, so there's never a missed call, and it's easy to call the person back without having to look up their number. Email notification of voicemail messages means that users never miss a message either."



8x8 is an important part of our IT strategy moving forward, and we don't pick our vendors lightly. We only want to work with professional companies, with proven track records that can represent our brand and set us apart in the industry. 8x8 is that kind of company.

—Tod Petty, President, Thrive Senior Living

April 2016 Update: Thrive Continues to Thrive with 8x8

Thrive now operates six senior living communities and has nine more under construction. All of these communities—along with Thrive’s welcome centers and corporate offices—rely on 8x8 unified communications.

When asked how 8x8 has contributed to Thrive’s extraordinary growth, Haywood points to “the ability to set up a welcome center trailer in less than a week because we don’t have to wait on a carrier. We can plug Polycom desk phones into hardwire that goes back to a router connected to a 4G SIM card. Basically we’re rolling out 8x8 phones on a cradle point with 4G LTE to get the welcome centers up as quickly as possible.”

Petty adds that 8x8’s ease of deployment is allowing Thrive to move away from welcome center trailers. “We now have retail space that we’re remodeling to look like our senior living communities. In just a few days, we can install the 8x8 solution there.”

8x8 Included in Third-Party Management Contracts

Along with constructing new communities, Thrive has received numerous requests to manage existing ones. According to Petty, 8x8 will be included in those third-party partnerships.

“One of the criteria for us partnering with someone will be that they adopt our communications system. In fact, if they don’t agree to use 8x8, then we’re probably going to pass on the contract. We can’t go backward and start using archaic phone technology now that we’re so spoiled by 8x8.”

Built-in Disaster Preparedness

Most Thrive communities are located in the southern U.S., and area prone to major storms. A major benefit of 8x8 is built-in disaster preparedness. Each Thrive community has an “emergency” cell phone. If for any reason the 8x8 phones go down, incoming calls are automatically routed to the emergency cell phone number.

“This is a business continuity feature that we can program ourselves,” explains Haywood. “We set up the emergency number when we set up the 8x8 virtual PBX. Then if something happens to the phones, we can make sure incoming calls aren’t missed.”

Partnering for Success

Asked what he would say to other senior housing providers interested in moving to the cloud, Petty immediately brings up his partnerships with 8x8 and Tazergy. “8x8 is a differentiator for us because we can provide high-quality phone service to our communities without hiring engineers to build a viable solution. And Tazergy is the reason our 8x8 implementation is so successful. Matt told me once that if a solution is 95% complete, it means nothing works. You need a skilled partner to get the last 5% done so it all works. For us, that partner is Tazergy.”

“8x8 is an important part of our IT strategy moving forward, and we don’t pick our vendors lightly. We only want to work with professional companies, with proven track records that can represent our brand and set us apart in the industry. 8x8 is that kind of company,” adds Petty.

Find out how 8x8 can help your business. Call **1.866.862.2811** or visit www.8x8.com

