

8x8 Seamlessly Connects Real Estate Agents Wherever They Work

RE/MAX Tri County, real estate company



In 2012, Hurricane Sandy hit New Jersey hard. Recurring power brownouts irreparably damaged RE/MAX Tri County's NEC phone system, which had previously been damaged by a lightning strike. Instead of installing another premises-based PBX, the company selected 8x8 hosted VoIP service. Now, with its phone system safely secured off site, the company is ready for anything.

Empowering Agents

When Rosalie Daniels founded RE/MAX Tri County in Hamilton, New Jersey, in 1991, she wasn't interested in running a traditional real estate company. Her business philosophy is to empower independent agents by letting them spread their wings while operating under the RE/MAX umbrella.

"Our company is like a professional association of doctors or lawyers who all work for the same firm," she explains. "Agents pay their share of expenses and get to keep their entire commission less a franchise fee. It's a very appealing economic model for independent agents, and it's made our business successful from the beginning."

Over the years, that success has grown to include 57 agents who handle both residential and commercial real estate, and a large service area that encompasses Mercer, Burlington and Monmouth counties in central New Jersey (hence the name RE/MAX "Tri County"). In keeping with Daniel's supportive but flexible approach, about 40% of the company's agents regularly work from home, and the remaining 60% work out of the company's main office.

Hurricane Sandy Damaged the Company's On-Site PBX

When Hurricane Sandy struck in 2012, the company's office was spared direct damage, but recurring brownouts damaged the hard drive of its 14-year-old NEC phone system. Daniels and her office manager, Mary Mammino, had dealt with repairing the phone system once before, when their building was struck by lightning. This time the prognosis was more dire: the hard drive was too old to be repaired and needed to be replaced quickly.



Customer: RE/MAX Tri County

Industry: Real estate

Location: Hamilton, New Jersey

8x8 Products:

- Virtual Office

Favorite 8x8 Features:

- Follow-me connectivity for mobile and work-at-home agents
- 8x8 mobile app
- Internet fax
- Easy setup for new agents

Initial Setup: 63 Virtual Office lines

Time to Deploy: 3 days

Internet Connection: Ethernet

Vendor Replaced: NEC Voicemail-Auto Attendant System using Aspire phones

Primary Reason Chose 8x8:

Company wanted a hosted VoIP solution, and 8x8 was highly recommended by a business partner

Website:

mercercountyhomesforsale.com



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—**Rosalie Daniels**
Founder and Broker
RE/MAX Tri County

“Our PBX was still working, but we were limping along,” says Mammino. “Because parts of the hard drive were damaged, features like electronic fax and voicemail were not reliable anymore. We knew it was just a matter of time before the whole system went down.”

Daniels had started looking into new phone technologies even before Hurricane Sandy, because she knew the NEC system was approaching its end of life. Although she didn’t have a specific vendor in mind, she did have one key criterion.

“I wanted our new phone system to be off site,” says Daniels. “I’d heard a lot of good things about hosted VoIP service, and it didn’t make sense for us to take on the burden of purchasing, installing and maintaining another on-site system.”

A Trusted Business Partner Recommends 8x8

Daniels and Mammino had to delay their decision for a few weeks while waiting for the company’s insurance company to settle their claim for the damaged phone system. In the meantime, they attended the annual statewide RE/MAX sales rally—and got a tip from a business partner that pointed them toward 8x8.

“A local title company we often work with heard we were looking for a new phone system,” explains Daniels. “They told us about their 8x8 hosted VoIP service and how great it was. It turned out their 8x8 account manager was also at the RE/MAX sales rally, so they introduced us, and everything fell into place.”

Daniels and Mammino worked with 8x8 to develop a proposal for a new system that would be installed as soon as RE/MAX Tri County’s insurance claim was settled. Once that happened, the entire installation process took just three days.

“Our agents are busy salespeople who don’t have the time or patience to learn new technology, so we created their user profiles for them,” says Mammino. “That way, their VoIP phones were ready to use as soon as the system cut over.”

“Even though our agents didn’t do much training on the new system, the 8x8 interface makes it very easy for them to use the phone features,” adds Daniels.

Follow-Me Service Seamlessly Connects Work-at-Home Agents

With 8x8 hosted VoIP service, every RE/MAX Tri County agent now has a direct phone line and can take calls anywhere. This means even the company’s many work-at-home agents are now seamlessly connected to the main office.

“With our old system, we couldn’t transfer callers to agents who worked at home,” explains Mammino. “Our receptionist would have to take a message and have the agent call back, or she would have to give out the agent’s home number or cell phone number.”

As a business owner, Daniels appreciates the way 8x8’s Follow-Me service makes her organization look unified.

“With 8x8, we can route calls right away—to the agent’s home, cell phone or computer. The caller has no idea that the agent is not in the office,” she says. “8x8’s service is absolutely seamless, and lets us handle incoming calls much more efficiently.”



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Internet Fax Enhances Document Security

Like many real estate companies, RE/MAX Tri County relies heavily on faxing to transmit signed documents. 8x8's Internet fax feature has dramatically improved both the timeliness and security of faxed materials for the company.

"8x8 turns faxes into electronic documents that agents receive on their computers or their phones," says Mammino. "They can see them and respond immediately, which is essential in our business."

"Old-fashioned faxing is unreliable and not secure," agrees Daniels. "The financial documents we receive often include highly confidential information. When they come in over a fax machine, anybody can see them. With 8x8, faxes go directly to the correct party and no one else."

Access to All Messages from Any Device Saves Time

In addition to receiving electronic faxes in their inboxes, RE/MAX Tri County agents see all their email and voicemail messages, too. They can read or listen to messages using their smartphones or computers without having to switch devices.

Daniels notes that agents can even review messages or answer calls on their computers and then log in to modify their call forwarding and other account features.

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8x8 Mobile Features Let Agents Make Sales Anywhere

RE/MAX Tri County's agents are constantly on the move, showing properties in multiple counties. The mobile features included in the company's 8x8 hosted VoIP service ensure they never miss a sales call.

"Our agents can log into their 8x8 accounts and choose where and how they want their calls routed," says Daniels. "It truly lets them work from anywhere."

Take a Vacation—Customers Won't Know You're Gone

Daniels experienced that freedom first-hand during a recent trip to Mexico. She used the 8x8 mobile app on her smartphone to answer business calls.

"Nobody even knew I was gone," she exclaims. "People would call my regular office number, and I would answer on my cell phone as if I were there. And it was all done through 8x8 VoIP service, so there were no extra charges on my cell phone."

Daniels and Mammino estimate that about 80% of the company's agents are now using the 8x8 mobile app on their iPhones or Android phones. The remaining 20% simply log in and forward calls to their cell phones when they're on the go.

"We do a lot of business on our cell phones, and 8x8 makes it easy for agents to take the office with them," says Daniels.

CASE STUDY

Adding New Agents Takes Minutes

As the office manager, Mammino is responsible for setting up new agents on the company's phone system. In the past, it was a tiered process that took several days and communications with several different companies.

"It was horrendous," she recalls. "Our agents didn't have direct lines, so we had to work with the vendor who managed our phone system and then work with the phone company to get new extensions for our agents."

Now with 8x8 hosted VoIP service, the process takes just a few minutes.

"To set up new agents, I contact our 8x8 account manager to add the lines we need. He typically gets back to me within a couple of hours, and then I set up the new agent profiles online. It's very easy and only takes about 30 minutes," says Mammino.

"Before we were at the mercy of our vendors and service providers," says Daniels. "8x8 gives us state-of-the-art equipment and great support, plus we still have full control over our phone system and our business."

Increasing Benefits as Users Continue to Learn

Both Daniels and Mammino agree that there are still many more benefits agents can reap from the company's 8x8 phone system. The challenge is getting agents to slow down long enough to learn about more advanced features.

"Salespeople tend to be impatient with technology, and our agents are no exception," says Daniels. "But they're already seeing how much they can do with the 8x8 system, and we're planning to provide more training so they can take full advantage of everything that 8x8 has to offer."

8x8 Provides Business Continuity and Peace of Mind

In the meantime, Daniels and Mammino are confident that 8x8 hosted VoIP will continue to serve the company well—no matter what natural disasters might come their way.

"With 8x8 and its mobile app, we can always use our cell phones to run the business if the power goes out," says Mammino. "Having a hosted system gives us more peace of mind."

Even so, Daniels hopes there isn't another "storm of the century" in the company's future.

"But if there is another one, hopefully lightning won't strike twice!" she says, laughing.

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