

Hummel Landscape relies on coverage in remote locations with AT&T mobility solutions

- **Business needs** - Technology to support landscape business with crews that sometimes work in remote locations
- **Networking solution** - AT&T-powered cellphones and tablets enable Hummel workers to access files and photos in the field and stay in touch with the office no matter where the job takes them
- **Business value** - Enhanced employee safety and efficiency, business process improvement
- **Industry focus** - Landscaping and landscape supply
- **Size** - \$1.5 - \$2 million annual revenue

About Hummel Landscape, Inc. and Hummel Landscape Supply

Hummel Landscape, Inc. is a family-owned landscape company that specializes in designing, installing, and maintaining beautiful residential and commercial landscapes. The company also delivers quality bulk landscaping materials to contractors and do-it-yourself customers in Cobb, Marietta, Roswell, Cherokee, and Woodstock, Georgia. With more than 30 years of combined experience in the landscaping industry, Hummel Landscape, Inc. is an outstanding resource to help homeowners and contractors with their design and supply needs.

The situation

Hummel employees use cellphones and tablet computers to manage their work assignments. However, the mobile carrier Hummel used was unable to deliver the reliability the company needed to stay in touch with its crews in the field.

Solution

Dependable AT&T mobility solutions now keep Hummel landscaping crews connected wherever their assignments take them. AT&T-powered cellphones and tablets make the crews more efficient and accessible while enhancing worker safety on the job. Company officials appreciate the straightforward rate plans, easy device management, and dedicated account team support that AT&T Business offers.

Life beyond the cubicle

At an age when most kids were just playing baseball or video games, Chris and Sean Hummel had already launched their first business. The Hummels started mowing lawns in their northern Virginia community. Soon they expanded their client list by pulling lawnmowers behind their bikes to service customers beyond their neighborhood.

Fast forward a decade. Sean, the youngest of the four Hummel brothers, earned degrees at Virginia Tech. He worked in the corporate world—which was his inspiration for launching a landscaping business. “As I sat in a cubicle for two years behind a computer without even being able to see out a window,” Hummel said, “I realized that I wasn’t going to last very long doing that. I always thought about working outside and being able to see a job through to completion.”

Sean and his brother Chris decided to start a business in northwest Georgia. They replaced their bikes with a Ford F-150 truck, and they were off. Now Sean is co-owner and vice president of Hummel Landscape, Inc. and Hummel Landscape Supply. “Life outside the cubicle is very rewarding,” he said.

Early success leads to expansion

Like many siblings, the Hummel brothers were competitive as they grew up. As adults, they work well together. Chris is detail-oriented and keeps the company focused on big-picture items. He handles most of the billing, accounts receivable, and accounts payable. Sean manages the crew scheduling. He also orders materials and supplies for Hummel Landscape, Inc. and Hummel Landscape Supply. “We are constantly looking for ways to improve the service and quality of the work we provide to our customers,” Sean said. “We’ve found a pretty good balance.”

The quality of their landscaping work attracted so many customers that the company soon added crews and expanded their business to serve more areas. After a few years, the brothers launched Hummel Landscape Supply, which provides bulk landscaping materials, such as hardwood mulches, topsoil, fill dirt, gravel, egg rock, and Tennessee river rock to individuals and other landscape companies.

Both businesses have attracted between 5,000 and 7,000 customers.

Technology advances efficiency

A great deal of Hummel Landscape business is conducted the way landscapers have always worked, with shovels and earth movers. And they labor under the hot Georgia sun. But the brothers also use technology to enhance operational efficiency. This includes state-of-the-art computers in the office, with software that manages ordering, billing, payroll, and other essential functions.

Something as simple as replacing paper invoices with email bills has made a big difference. “Now we’re getting paid a lot faster, which helps out tremendously,” Sean said.

The business also makes frequent use of cellphones and tablets in the office and in the field. “When I order materials from our vendors, I can just send a text to 90% of our vendors instead of having to call them. I text and say, ‘Hey, we need another trailer of pine straw.’ Or, ‘Send us 85 yards of brown mulch and rock as soon as possible.’ I get an immediate response: ‘Hey, we got your order. It’s on the way. We’re sending it out.’”

“The reliability has been huge but having our account rep has really been the biggest help to us.”

Sean Hummel

Co-owner and Vice President,
Hummel Landscape, Inc. and Hummel Landscape Supply

Efficiency, convenience, protection

Technology has had a significant impact on the Hummels’ business. “It just makes me so much more efficient with ordering,” Sean said.

It has also made a difference in the lawn and landscaping side of the business. “If a customer wants to install a walking path, I can use my phone or tablet and show them hundreds of pictures of rock and

stone,” Sean said. “They can quickly see exactly what I’m talking about, what the material looks like, and how we’ve used it at other jobs. That’s been a huge thing.”

Another key benefit the technology brings is enhanced worker safety. The company devices help protect Hummel employees in the field. Before crews install irrigation equipment or a retaining wall, they use an app on their cell phones to locate all the utilities on the property. “I text the address, give a description of what we’re doing, and get an immediate response,” Hummel said. “They send somebody to mark the underground utilities, so we know where all the gas and water lines are.”

Phones and tablets also help Hummel deal with subcontractors. “I may get to a job where we need to grind some stumps,” Sean said. “I can take pictures of the stumps and send them to my stump subcontractor.” Instead of trading calls, sending photos lets the contractor see exactly the work that needs to be completed. “It’s amazing how much more efficient we are and what we can do with these devices nowadays.”

Staff often call Hummel if they need additional supplies or have a question about a job. “They just send me a text or a picture,” he said. “It’s a lifesaver, honestly. It saves a lot of time.”

Ongoing connectivity challenges

Despite their heavy reliance on technology, Hummel Landscape experienced continuous problems with its devices. The company that supplied connectivity for its phones and tablets was not always up to the challenge. The service was unreliable, and the coverage was uneven.

Loyalty is important to the Hummel brothers. They work hard to build strong relationships with their customers, employees and suppliers, so the Hummel companies stayed with the same mobile carrier for years, even with ongoing problems. “There were a lot of dead spots, and it always seemed that we had no coverage when we were out of town,” Sean said.

In addition, the thought of moving to a new carrier and changing devices was overwhelming. “It’s one of those things when you just want to put your head in the sand and not even think about it,” Sean said.

The problem was worsened because the Hummel companies didn’t receive quality customer support. “We never had a go-to person,” Sean said. “It was like starting over every time, reintroducing ourselves.”

Seamless move increases reliability

An AT&T Business account representative met with the Hummels. The rep proposed combining all the company’s phones and tablets into a single contract. The brothers decided it was time to make a move.

“Our AT&T account rep told us, ‘Don’t worry about it. I’m going to handle this all for you and make it as pain-free as possible,’” Sean said. “And everything went

off pretty seamlessly. We were able to upgrade all of our devices. I regret not doing it five or six years ago.”

Switching to AT&T Business has meant increased reliability for Hummel employees. “The efficiency and the dependability of the network has been spot-on for us,” Sean said. “It’s worked great.” The company learned this firsthand in a recent emergency.

At the end of a Friday, one employee injured his hand. Sean rushed to the job site to help. Despite the remote location, the co-workers of the injured man were able to place a call to summon help.

“On the way to the site, I was able to schedule an appointment for him right away at an urgent care facility,” Sean said. The quick response enabled doctors to provide the immediate care his employee needed for a positive medical outcome.

Equally important is having a dedicated AT&T account team. “Our relationship with our account rep has been the biggest thing,” Sean said. “We like knowing that if we have an issue, we’re going to be able to call him and he’s going to be able to rectify it. The reliability has been huge but having our account rep has really been the biggest help to us.”