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# Emergency 911: A FirstClass Lifesaver for Cross- Platform Communication A Case Study



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## *Emergency 911: A FirstClass Lifesaver for Cross-Platform Communication*

Five months ago, King County Medic One entered the electronic age with the purchase and installation of computers in each of the paramedic headquarters. Until then, although the main administrative office had a number of PCs, communication with the outlying stations and with the individual paramedics had been problematic. In spite of the fact that almost everyone was already plugged in with mobile data terminals, pagers, mail, and fax machines, there was still the need for an integrated communication system to bring the stations together.

### **The FirstClass Solution**

Medic One decided that they needed an out-of-the-box communication solution that could run on Windows, Macintosh, and even DOS, and provide easy-to-use personal and group collaboration. Furthermore, the system needed to run equally well on the LAN in the office and over dial-up access from the dispersed medic stations or from people's homes. Finally, the software needed to be competitively priced, offer easy administration, and run on Medic One's existing hardware.

Medic One chose FirstClass by SoftArc Incorporated because it not only meets the above criteria (cross-platform, ease-of-use and administration, seamless remote access, cost-effectiveness, and low hardware requirements), but also because it offers a solution to the organizations' need to create custom forms and access existing corporate databases. The paramedic units connect their FirstClass system to an SQL database, used by employees for data entry and retrieval. Sylvia Feder, paramedic and FirstClass administrator contends: "Now that the Medic One FirstClass system has been operational for about five months, we are convinced that we made the right choice. FirstClass is deceptively easy to install and has minimal system requirements — features that somewhat belie its power."

In setting up their system, messaging communication was the first feature that most of the paramedics learned and used. E-mail can be sent to an individual, to several individuals, or to a custom mail list of users. The message history feature of FirstClass allows the sender to track a message's history (including a list of who has read, replied to, and/or forwarded the message), eliminating the problem of "What memo? I never read that memo!"

E-mail can also be sent to a "conference." In fact, at Medic One, the majority of communication now occurs within conferences. A conference is a public area for discussion, where users or groups of users can be given privileges to access information. "The primary advantage of conferences," explains Feder, "is that they serve to facilitate communication and organize information. On any given day, 100 or more messages may be sent on Medic One Online —and it would be overwhelming if these were delivered to everyone's personal mailbox! Keeping messages organized in conferences makes it easy to scan subjects selectively, and read and reply only to those that are of interest."

The ability to create custom forms in FirstClass has also reduced Medic One's paperwork.

Now, paramedics can turn in their overtime requests, shift trade requests, or post a memo to the medical services officer or administrative personnel, either from the stations or from home. According to Feder, "Thanks to its e-mail, conferencing, and forms features, we now use FirstClass for the majority of our communication. For Medic One, and for those of us who are responsible for administering the system, FirstClass is a gentle, yet powerful communication tool."