

# Combined MAX Dispatch/Call-Taking Delivers Small Footprint, Big Benefits

*The Zetron MAX Dispatch and MAX Call-Taking systems recently installed at the new Huntington Indiana Central Dispatch center are being praised for their clean design; ease of use; and compact, combined footprint.*

A local commissioner deemed it “a historic event” when, after many years of considering consolidation, the City and County of Huntington, Indiana, finally decided to combine their two separate public safety answering points (PSAPs) into a single center.

There were many good reasons to do this. Consolidation would allow them to centralize their communications, combine their staff, and purchase and maintain equipment for one center instead of two. It would also save both agencies an estimated \$300,000 in 2014 alone.

The Huntington Central Dispatch center that resulted from this decision went live in October of 2013. Equipped with Zetron’s IP-based MAX Dispatch and MAX Call-Taking systems, it is now a fully functioning consolidated operation that is well positioned for the future. It has also become a great source of pride for all of those involved in the project.

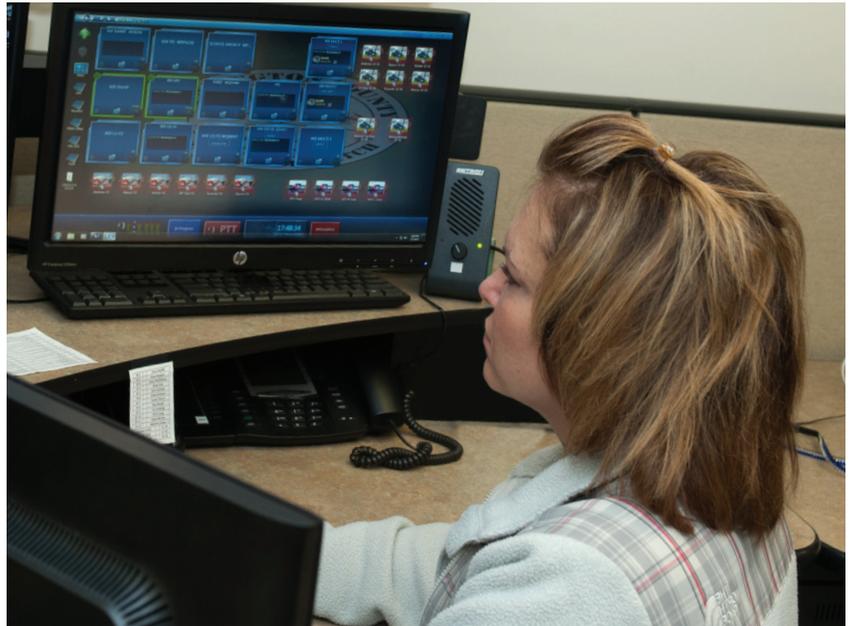
## City and County of Huntington

Prior to becoming the first director of Huntington Central Dispatch, Melissa Farthing was a dispatcher herself, working full-time for the county and part-time for the city. So she understood the basic workings and responsibilities of both PSAPs.

“Before the consolidation, the police department provided 9-1-1 call-taking and dispatching for the City of Huntington,” she says. “The sheriff’s department did the same for its own personnel, other county agencies, and the remaining municipalities in the county.”

Farthing says that it was a convergence of personnel and positive circumstances that finally brought the consolidation about.

“The police chief, sheriff, and mayor were all on board and gave the project their support,” she says. “State funds were also available that would allow us to equip the new center



with new, IP-based equipment rather than having to use our equipment that was 12-years old and whose warranties were about to expire.”

## ‘There when we need them’

Once the decision was made to consolidate, specifications were defined, and the project to equip the new center went out for bid. Zetron reseller J&K Communications responded with a strong proposal featuring Zetron’s IP-based MAX Dispatch and Call-Taking systems.

Headquartered in Columbia City, Indiana, J&K had been the city’s and county’s equipment provider for several decades. “We have a very good relationship with J&K,” says Farthing. “They’re honest, responsive, and there when we need them.”

## A single-vendor solution

Zetron’s reputation and the equipment itself strengthened J&K’s proposal. Both the city and county had used Zetron’s Series 4000 dispatch system for many years and were happy with its performance, so they trusted Zetron and its products.

The MAX systems also constituted a single-vendor solution. "In the past, we've had to call different technicians to service our different equipment," Farthing explains. "With the MAX systems, we'd have just one vendor to call for everything."

J&K was awarded the project. The installation would include five positions each of MAX Dispatch and MAX Call-Taking as well as several remote call-taking positions at a local hospital. It would also support remote backup positions if Huntington ever wanted to use them.

### 'They all stepped up'

The new center was to be located at what had formerly been the sheriff's dispatch office. But the room had to be gutted and remodeled before the new equipment could be installed.

To facilitate this process, both agencies' operations were moved temporarily into the city dispatch center. The city and county dispatchers worked together there for nine months before moving to the new center.

Farthing says that this was a blessing in disguise.

"No one knew whether the two groups would be able to work together, especially in this small space," she says. "But they all stepped up to help and cross-train each other. They got to know their new responsibilities before having to learn the new equipment. This worked very well. I'd recommend this approach to anyone who's considering consolidation."

### Meanwhile, back at the new center...

While normal dispatch and call-taking operations continued at the temporary site, the new center was taking shape.

"We tore down and removed the old equipment so the contractors could remodel the room," says J&K systems director, Jim Bowers. "Once they were done, we came in and put in the new equipment."

He says that the installation included integrating the dispatch equipment with a number of different analog and digital networks.

"We connected MAX Dispatch to Indiana's SAFE-T trunking system," says Bowers. "We also integrated it with the fire department's analog VHF network, the schools' VHF network, and the county highway department's digital NEXEDGE® system. This gives the PSAP great interoperability with agencies throughout the region and state."

### Making the screens familiar

Another important aspect of the implementation involved setting up the console screens with icons, colors and naming conventions similar to those on the previous equipment.

"J&K knew how we'd named our channels and set up our screens before," says Farthing. "So they were able to configure the MAX screens to look like those on our previous system. This made learning the new equipment a piece of cake."

### Training and transition

Over a period of about a week, J&K provided hands-on training to groups of three to four dispatchers at a time. A console was also set up so dispatchers could practice with the new equipment on their own. By the time everyone moved into the new center, they were well acquainted with their new responsibilities, the equipment, and each other.

"The transition was very smooth," says J&K sales manager, Ted Hurley, "even from the first day."

### A model for other counties

Huntington Central Dispatch has been up and running for about four months. Farthing says that the longer she and her dispatchers use the equipment, the better they like it.

"It's clean, compact, and easy to use," she says. "Because MAX Dispatch and Call-Taking share a single computer, they take up less space at each position. Our dispatchers really like the control they now have over their screens. And I'm very happy with the new equipment's administrative features. I can input a change only once, and it propagates through the entire system. And the MAX Call-Taking reporting feature gives me easy access to all kinds of call statistics. This not only provides information about particular events, but helps me track trends over time."

"I have a great staff, a great center and great equipment," Farthing adds. "We're all very proud that our center is serving as a model for other counties that are on the verge of change. ■"



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