



Implementing Virtual Trustee Meetings

How SSA is bringing trustees together in a time of social distancing

Challenges

- ✦ Keep planned trustee meetings for 50 Taft-Hartley customers on schedule while experts were recommending people avoid large gatherings.
- ✦ Get all required documents into the hands of trustees for the meetings.

Solutions

- ✦ Using their VOIP phone system, SSA was able to set up and host trustee meetings via video conference call.
- ✦ Meeting materials were turned into PDF packages that could be posted to SSA's web portal or emailed to trustees.



Southwest Service Administrators is an independent Third Party Administrator (TPA) serving Taft-Hartley self-funded health & welfare trust funds as well as defined benefit and defined contribution pension plans. They have been a basys customer since 2012.



Implementing Virtual Trustee Meetings

Southwest Service Administrators (SSA), a large TPA serving 50 Taft-Hartley plans across Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and Texas, is used to juggling multiple trustee meetings each quarter, including at their Phoenix HQ.

As the COVID-19 epidemic exploded in mid-March, regulators and health experts warned against large group gatherings. The TPA had already taken the step of having no more than half the staff in the office at any one time, enabling them to handle essential operations while maintaining social distancing. The company occasionally had held video conference staff meetings in the past to bring together employees from the satellite offices.

So with trustee input as vital as ever during the crisis, SSA decided it was time to try virtual trustee meetings. While trustees are used to face-to-face meetings, getting large binders of printed materials, being able to caucus in small groups on specific issues and in-person voting, SSA found a solution.

Taking advantage of capabilities built into their Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) phone system from 8x8, SSA set up a video conference call.

Presentations were viewable by participants on their PC or smartphone. Those with video capabilities could see one another; those without could dial in and participate by phone. Separate conference lines were available for side chats and consultations, so caucuses could be private but online.

Reports from the basys system and other key documents were turned into PDFs and organized into ebooks, and trustees were able to download their copies from SSA's web portal or, on request, were emailed a zipped version.

The results?

"It was a great success and has allowed our trustee meetings to continue as scheduled," says Carol Fisher, SSA's Director of Data Operations. The TPA held its first two virtual trustee meetings in mid-March, with 15-20 trustees, consultants and SSA staff each time. With a little boost from technology, trustees were able to do most of what they would have done in person, fulfilling their fiduciary responsibility.

SSA has already scheduled additional virtual trustee meetings while the COVID-19 disruptions continue, and will work with their clients to consider continuing the practice beyond the crisis.

"The virtual meetings also saved on travel costs, and the meetings actually were shorter, which everyone seemed to appreciate," says Fisher. Best of all, everyone stayed safe. ✦



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