

**ZETRON**®

# ADVANTAGE



## 51-position MAX Call-Taking Equips CenterPoint Energy

**Passing the Ultimate Test**

Jersey County, IL

**Strengthening the Link**

**Between PSAP and Community**

Chowchilla, CA



*Photo courtesy of CenterPoint Energy.*

# 51-position MAX Call-Taking Equips CenterPoint Energy

**CenterPoint Energy's MAX Call-Taking system provides the features and functionality necessary to help ensure the reliability, effectiveness, and safety of CenterPoint Energy's operations.**

Houston-based CenterPoint Energy recently won not just one award, but two, for leadership and innovation in the energy industry. Their subsidiary, CenterPoint Energy Houston Electric, LLC, won both the International Smart Grid Action 2016 Award of Excellence and the Global Smart Grid Federations Best Smart Grid Project for 2016.

Why would the company receive these awards, and why does it matter? It comes down to a few basic things that resonate with just about everyone: better service, reduced costs, and improved efficiency.

Kenny Mercado, senior vice president of CenterPoint Energy's Electric Operations, explained in a press release posted by PR Newswire, June 9, 2016: "Our smart grid reduced outages by more than 134 million minutes, enabled restoration of more than 1.5 million outage cases without a customer phone call, and saved tens of millions of dollars in eliminated fees for more than 2.3 million customers in Southeast Texas." The press release also stated that their smart grid saved roughly 1.4 million gallons of fuel—which is equivalent to more than 13,000 tons of CO2 emissions.

CenterPoint Energy's recently installed MAX Call-Taking system is one of the key tools that helps support these efforts and ensure reliable service to its customers. That's because the system provides the critical connection between CenterPoint Energy's field technicians and the distribution control center through which they coordinate their work.

## CenterPoint Energy

CenterPoint Energy provides electric transmission and distribution, natural gas distribution, and natural gas sales and services to more than five million customers throughout Arkansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas.

CenterPoint Energy's call-taking system is of vital importance to its operations. The system supports the company's 24/7 service to customers and enables the company to respond quickly and effectively whenever those services are threatened or interrupted.

"Our line technicians use the call-taking system to report issues and coordinate work on the electrical grid," explains CenterPoint Energy operations supervisor, John Weatherington. "For instance, a line technician who needs to perform some work on a circuit will call in to the distribution control center to have them tag the circuit so the work can be done safely." He says that a separate group of technicians also uses the call-taking system to handle residential metering issues. Their calls go to a smaller call center that is apart from the distribution control center.

### Time for a new system

When CenterPoint Energy's existing call-taking system recently reached its end of life, the company initiated an effort to replace it.

They issued an RFP for a new system, specifying that it would have to be highly redundant and reliable, provide sophisticated call-handling functionality, and integrate with several of CenterPoint Energy's legacy systems.

Zetron's MAX Call-Taking was chosen for the project for its ability to thoroughly meet these requirements. It had been designed from the start with public-safety agencies in mind, so its platform was able to provide mission-critical levels of redundancy. It would also support automatic call distribution (ACD) functionality, and include auto-attendant and Automatic Number Identification (ANI) capabilities.

CenterPoint Energy submitted an order for a 51-position MAX Call-Taking solution to equip its distribution control center and residential metering communication center.

### A 50-position mock-up

MAX Call-Taking was fully staged, configured, and tested at Zetron's offices in Redmond, Washington, before being shipped to the customer's location. This is a common practice for systems of this type. But there was one aspect of the installation preparations that was not so common. Zetron set up a 50-position mock-up of CenterPoint Energy's MAX Call-Taking system at Zetron's lab in Redmond. "It's almost an exact replica of their system," explains John Scott, one of the Zetron engineers who oversaw the project. "It helped us understand what was required to get a particular result, which was important for this project because we were tailoring the system to some uses that are quite different from those a public-safety customer typically requires." (Even after the system cutover, they have continued to use this mock system to test updates before installing them on the actual system.)

Once the staging and initial testing were complete, the system was installed at CenterPoint Energy's site, where it underwent final tweaking and testing. "Then we flipped the switch and cut over in one event," says Weatherington. "It was just a matter of a few keystrokes to assign the phone number to the new system."

## Features and functionality

Scott and Weatherington both say that MAX Call-Taking is delivering fully on the features and functionality for which it was originally chosen.

"It's highly redundant," says Scott. "If an interruption occurs, the system's automatic failover will kick in and keep operations running without any detectable disruption to those using or calling into the system."

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**“Call flows can also be adjusted as needed to ensure a call is answered efficiently and not left unanswered in a queue.”**

*John Weatherington, Operations Supervisor, CenterPoint Energy*

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The system is also providing a host of important call-handling features. "It sorts calls based on variables such as geographic region, the caller's role, and whether it's a switching or trouble call," says Scott. "This helps ensure that each call reaches its intended destination quickly."

"Call flows can also be adjusted as needed to ensure a call is answered efficiently and not left unanswered in a queue," adds Weatherington. "If one position is busy or unavailable, calls are automatically routed to the next available call taker. Also, during the day, a call taker might oversee a single service area. But at night, when activity slows down, he or she might handle all 16 of our service areas. And when we experience an extreme weather event, multiple call takers can be assigned to cover a single area that has been hard hit and is generating a high volume of calls."

MAX Call-Taking is also set up to support CenterPoint Energy's existing conference phone system. "Their system allows them to daisy-chain multiple conference phones across big conference room tables," says Scott. "We successfully integrated it into MAX Call-Taking, and it works great."

Although CenterPoint Energy's MAX Call-Taking system functions primarily behind the scenes, it clearly contributes to the effectiveness and reliability of the company's overall operations. In so doing, it plays a major role in helping CenterPoint Energy maintain its position as a leading force in the energy industry.■



# MAX Call-Taking Passes the Ultimate PSAP Test

*Built in 1893-94, the Jersey County Courthouse is on the U.S. Register of Historic Places.*

**The MAX Call-Taking system installed at Jersey County, Illinois, is receiving kudos for its redundancy, sophisticated reporting features, and the many ways it simplifies dispatchers' jobs.**

William "Rob" Hedger, executive director of the Emergency Telephone Safety Board (ETSB)/E9-1-1 center in Jersey County, Illinois, makes no bones about his enthusiasm for Zetron's MAX Call-Taking system.

In a recent letter to the director of another public-safety answering point (PSAP) that was considering MAX Call-Taking, Hedger was very willing to vouch for it: "We installed MAX Call-Taking about eight months ago, and are very happy with it," he wrote. "We looked at a number of other systems, but we chose MAX Call-Taking, and we're glad we did."

Not only has MAX Call-Taking proved to be a perfect fit for Jersey County's current operations; it has also prepared them to meet Next-Generation i3 standards and has put them in a position to share mutual support with other nearby agencies that are also using MAX Call-Taking. This adds considerable redundancy and reliability to the services that 9-1-1 centers throughout the region are able to provide to their immediate and extended communities.

## **Why a new system?**

The Jersey County 9-1-1 center answers all 9-1-1 calls originating within the county and provides dispatching for all law-enforcement, fire, and emergency services, except for Jerseyville City, which handles its own dispatching.

In 2014, Jersey County was notified that their aging 9-1-1 system would no longer be supported. This is not good news for a PSAP. "We had to start looking at what we'd need, both for the immediate future and beyond," says Hedger.

They defined their requirements for a new system and began a process of reviewing products that might meet them. This included interviewing multiple vendors, inviting some to give onsite demonstrations, and visiting sites where systems they were considering were already installed.

### **MAX Call-Taking is a strong contender**

Although they were looking at a number of solutions, the Zetron MAX Call-Taking system proposed by Zetron reseller Global Technical Systems, Inc. (GTSi) was a standout from the start.

“We went and saw MAX Call-Taking systems that were installed at several counties nearby,” says Hedger. “We really liked the system’s small footprint in the backroom, which was top concern for us because our space is so limited. We also liked its robustness, its ability to provide the backbone for both our 9-1-1 and administrative system, and the fact that it would facilitate backup with other agencies using the same system. And GTSi would be servicing the system. They are our service provider for our Zetron dispatch system. They’re close by and very responsive; we have a great working relationship with them.”

“The network can be a single pinch point for a lot of systems,” adds GTSi V.P., Chris Ginder. “The level of redundancy Zetron has built into MAX Call-Taking addresses this issue better than any other system on the market. Jersey County was very impressed with this.”

### **One good system leads to another**

Another factor was that MAX Call-Taking would not be Jersey County 9-1-1’s first Zetron system. They’d been using a Zetron Series 4000 radio dispatch system since the early 2000s. And they were very satisfied with its performance and their experiences with Zetron.

“Their Zetron dispatch system was super reliable, and so was Zetron” says Ginder. “When a fire broke out in their equipment room and destroyed the system’s card cage (through no fault of the Zetron system), Zetron jumped into high gear to replace it. They immediately mailed out new equipment, we picked it up at the airport, and we had the PSAP back on the air within 24 hours. They were very impressed by the speed and quality of the service, all around.”

For all of these reasons, Jersey County chose MAX Call-Taking as their new system. Not only would it do the best job of meeting their criteria, but it would also update the agency to an IP-based, i3-Next Generation 9-1-1 system designed to support the expanded call formats—such as text to 9-1-1 messages—PSAPs will eventually be required to handle.

### **A live cutover, no missed calls**

Ginder says that to install the new system for Jersey County 9-1-1, GTSi used the same successful approach that has worked very well for many of their projects.

“We have a technique where we pull one of the 9-1-1 trunks off of the existing system and get the new system up, running, and tested,” says Ginder. “Then we install one position and slowly transfer trunk by trunk from the old system to the new one. This gradual approach gives us a nice reverse path that allows us to go backwards quickly if something should go awry. But—knock on wood—nothing ever has! And that was the case this time as well. We were able to cut the system live and never miss a call.”

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**“MAX Call-Taking... passes the most important test of all. It makes our dispatchers’ jobs much easier.”**

*William “Rob” Hedger, Executive Director, Jersey County E.T.S.B. / E9-1-1*

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### **Training on an intuitive system**

Global Technology Systems trained the agency’s telecommunicators on the new MAX Call-Taking system. “The training went relatively fast,” says Hedger. “It’s an easy system to operate.”

“The telecommunicators had many of the general concepts down before training even started,” Ginder adds. “But the training was useful because it helped them make the most of enhancements and supporting functions and features that are new to them.”

### **No cookie-cutter deployment**

When asked whether GTSi made adaptations to the MAX Call-Taking system for Jersey County’s purposes, Ginder says: “There’s no cookie cutter deployment for call-taking. There are always adaptations—for CAD [computer-aided dispatch], records, mapping, existing networks, and existing telephony equipment. So yes, there were modifications. But MAX Call-Taking has the latitude to accommodate them.”

### **A successful year**

A year into its operation, MAX Call-Taking continues to garner praise for its small footprint, ability to integrate with administrative phone lines, and its flexibility to support any expansion the center might want to undertake. These are the very qualities that prompted Hedger to write his letter endorsing the system. He has praise for additional features as well.

“It’s a very easy system to use,” he says. “Everything our dispatchers need is at their fingertips. Plus, with our old system, I wasn’t able to pull call reports and had no idea how many calls we were taking per month. Now, I can easily go in and pull the call data I need in order to report back to the ETSB on how many calls we’re taking. This is great because it allows us to give a complete and accurate accounting of what we’re actually doing. But MAX Call-Taking also passes the most important test of all,” Hedger adds. “It makes our dispatchers’ jobs much easier.” ■



# MAX Dispatch and Call-Taking Strengthen Link Between a PSAP and Its Community

**The new MAX Dispatch and Call-Taking systems recently installed for the Chowchilla, California, Police Department are improving agency operations while delivering the reliable performance the agency had always gotten from its previous Zetron equipment.**

Casadi Denny is a woman who knows how to make things happen. Upon being promoted to the position of administrative supervisor for the Chowchilla, California, police department's dispatch and records program, she set an ambitious goal. It was to replace the agency's aging Zetron dispatch and 9-1-1 call-taking systems with new solutions that would be up-to-date and next-generation capable. Although their existing systems were performing reliably and well, demands upon them were bumping up against the limits of their capacity. In an emergency, a public safety answering point (PSAP) is typically the first link between those who need help and those who can provide it. Denny had to be confident that her communications equipment was up to the task.

Last summer, with the help of Zetron and Zetron reseller Delta Wireless, her goal was realized. The PSAP went live with new Zetron MAX Dispatch and MAX Call-Taking systems and Eventide logging recorders.

Not only is the agency now equipped with solutions that provide the reliability necessary to ensure that their link to the community is strong, but the updated technology has streamlined and improved

their operations. What's more, 24/7 system service, maintenance, and support from Delta Wireless and Zetron are only a phone call away.

## **In the center of the Central Valley**

The city of Chowchilla is located in Madera County, in the middle of California's Central Valley—a large, flat valley that dominates the geographic center of the state. Although the local economy relies heavily on agriculture, its increasing industrial base has contributed significantly to Chowchilla's rapid growth in recent years. In the 14-year period from 2000 to 2014, its population increased 76 percent.

## **The Chowchilla PD and PSAP**

As the city's primary PSAP and dispatch center, the Chowchilla Police Department Dispatch/Records Program answers emergency 9-1-1 calls and provides dispatching for the city's police and fire departments. They also handle non-emergency telephone calls, greet visitors to the police department, act as the point of contact for other police and public safety agencies, and assist with the maintenance of department records. The PSAP also answers calls for other nearby agencies when their emergency phones go down.

The need to be able to provide reliable backup helped fuel the decision to purchase Chowchilla's new communications equipment.



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**“ Our MAX systems are delivering the same **rock-solid reliability** and **performance** we got from our previous Zetron equipment, but with updated technology and functionality. **I’m very happy and very impressed.**”** *Casadi Denny, Administrative Supervisor, Dispatch/Records Program, Chowchilla Police Department*

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“We’d been able to take calls for the city and county of Madera whenever their systems went down,” Denny explains. “But it was putting a lot of stress on our system. We decided the time had come to update our technology so we’d be able to continue to take calls for the entire county if necessary with no problem.”

### **Going with Zetron**

The process of selecting and purchasing the new equipment was fairly straightforward. “Although we really liked our Zetron equipment, we briefly considered a non-Zetron call-taking system Madera County was using then,” says Denny. “But when that system failed a few times, our existing Zetron system took up the slack, and I was very impressed with how it handled the call volumes. That clinched it; there was no way I was going with a vendor other than Zetron.”

### **Delta Wireless steps up**

The new equipment for Chowchilla included three positions of MAX Call-Taking, two positions of MAX Dispatch, and Eventide IP-based logging recorders that would record call-taking and dispatch transmissions at each position. The purchase was made through Zetron; Delta Wireless was brought in to install the equipment and provide ongoing service and support once implementation was done.

With offices in Atwater, Sacramento, Stockton, and Turlock, California, Delta Wireless provides two-way radio, 9-1-1 phone, and video surveillance systems for customers throughout northern and central California.

### **Implementation and training**

Delta Wireless field service manager, George Gonzalez, oversaw the project for Chowchilla. “The implementation began with staging the equipment in the customer’s training room across the street from the police department,” he says. “The positions were also set up temporarily in the training room.”

Denny was then invited to review and provide feedback on their progress up to that point. “They wanted to make sure my team and I were happy with how everything was laid out and configured, including the dispatchers’ screens,” she says. “Delta made adjustments based on our feedback. Then they trained me and each of our dispatchers individually.”

### **Putting the new systems in place**

When all the preliminary work had been done, the equipment was transported to the police department communication center.

“We put everything in the back room, and set up the two systems side by side,” says Gonzalez. “We cut over each phone line and verified that it was working before moving to the next. Once this was done, we moved the radio one channel at a time. We kept the old equipment in place until everything was migrated and verified. Then, when the time came, we shut down the old equipment, pushed the old racks out of the way, moved the new racks in, and secured them in place.”

### **Care and courtesy**

Denny says that all throughout this process, Delta Wireless took great pains to complete their work without disrupting the agency’s ongoing operations.

“They were very careful and courteous,” she says. “If they had to bring something in, and we were on the phone or radio, they were extremely quiet. And if they had to wheel something in, and someone was on a call, they’d wait till until the call was finished before coming in.”

### **‘We love the equipment’**

The systems went live in September of 2015, so Denny and her staff have had plenty of time to get to know them. “We love our MAX equipment,” she says. “It’s so easy to use. The icons are laid out so cleanly. We know exactly what we’re clicking on. It’s very user friendly. And the logging recorder lets me search by lines, caller ID, or by date-time ranges. It helps us retrieve information for court cases that sometimes has a direct impact on the outcome. We also use it as a training tool to review a call and consider whether there might be a better way to handle a similar call next time.”

She says Zetron and Delta Wireless are continuing to provide “...excellent customer service. For instance, we were getting static on one of our phones,” she says. “So we called Delta, and Delta called Zetron, and the three of us talked. The Zetron tech didn’t know what was causing the problem, but he researched it and got back to us immediately. It turned out that we just needed to change a cord. But the point is, it was fixed immediately, and we felt well taken care of.”

“Our MAX systems are delivering the same rock-solid reliability and performance we got from our previous Zetron equipment, but with updated technology and functionality,” Denny continues. “I’m very happy and very impressed.” ■



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**PA NENA**

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