TRIBALHUB

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

Telecommunications

Insider's Insight
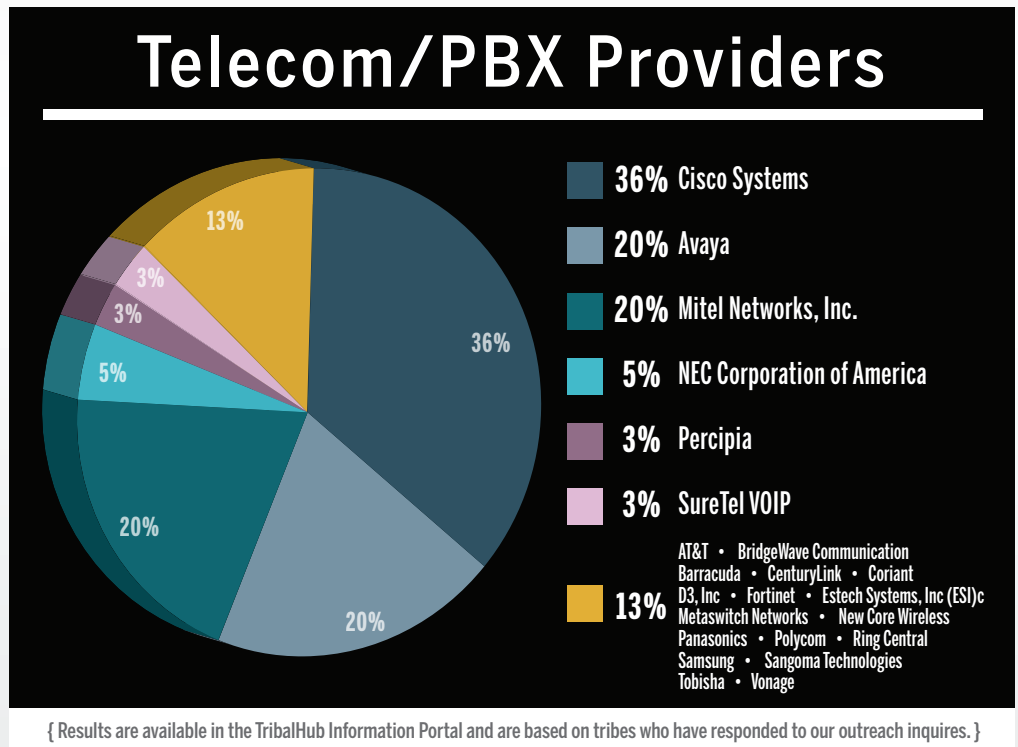### from TribalHub's Executive Officer, Mike Day

Telecommunications and tribes. This can be a very challenging and broad topic to cover. Tribes are sovereign governments that often include a wide variety of membership services, emergency response, health care, and large enterprises. That typically includes a large number of physical buildings located across a vast geographic area. Not only do you have to deal with the typical telecommunications systems and challenges similar to any commercial enterprise or business, but based upon a tribe's geographic location, membership size, access to other commercial resources and total land/reservation base, telecommunications services delivered effectively across all tribal land may be the goal.

Meanwhile, the technology of telecommunications continues to quickly innovate and evolve. The use and generally understood meaning of the term "telecommunications" has expanded in recent years. What was once a term primarily used to describe only traditional phone and voice service now includes voice, data/internet and video services transferred over copper cable, fiber-optics, radio, Wi-Fi or satellite services.

The convergence of voice (via voice-over-internet-protocol or VOIP), data/internet, and video onto a single shared infrastructure has also drastically changed telecommunications systems. A growing percentage of the population has given up their traditional home phone land-line and uses only their cellular phone or a service provided through a separate internet connection. Businesses are mulling the value of traditional phone service and many are moving towards solutions integrated with video-calling or desktop systems without a traditional phone handset. Take for example my personal cell phone, which uses internet Wi-Fi whenever connected, to send and receive all calls. Data, video and voice networks are converging from multiple networks and infrastructure into a single managed network.

Although telecommunications continues to evolve, none of that changes the fact that tribes often have a unique challenge. There is plenty of recent research online that indicates that far too many Native American populations are located in geographic regions that have poor access to telecommunications services. Providing telecommunications services within a single enterprise or business is difficult enough, but combine that with building out infrastructure on remote reservation trust land similar to what large commercial telecommunications companies provide in urban areas and you have an effort that is exponentially more costly and complex.

Our research in this month's Industry Insights Report is a combination of common telecommunication providers used by tribes in providing services to their own individual facilities and extended to include tribes that provide infrastructure to their tribal members as well. This month's interview with the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Telephone Authority focuses on a tribe that has the added challenge of providing telecommunication services directly to their membership located on tribal land.

Telecom/PBX Providers

- **36%** Cisco Systems
- **20%** Avaya
- **20%** Mitel Networks, Inc.
- **5%** NEC Corporation of America
- **3%** Percipia
- **3%** SureTel VOIP
- **13%** AT&T • BridgeWave Communication Barracuda • CenturyLink • Coriant D3, Inc • Fortinet • Estech Systems, Inc (ESI)c Metaswitch Networks • New Core Wireless Panasonics • Polycom • Ring Central Samsung • Sangoma Technologies Tobisha • Vonage

{ Results are available in the TribalHub Information Portal and are based on tribes who have responded to our outreach inquires. }

This graphic combines common telecommunications providers used in tribal buildings and enterprises as well as solutions to deliver telecommunications across tribal trust lands to members and to connect remote facilities.

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Telecommunications

Interview with C.R.S.T. Telephone Authority
Mona L. Thompson | General Manager, C.R.S.T. Telephone Authority

Recently TribalHub spoke with Mona L. Thompson, the General Manager at C.R.S.T. Telephone Authority about the work her organization is doing to provide efficient telecommunication services to the Cheyenne River Reservation.

South Dakota is home to nine federally recognized tribes. The Cheyenne River Reservation which is located in north-central South Dakota, approximately 105 miles from Pierre, South Dakota, is the fourth largest reservation (land area) in the United States and home to roughly 70% of the approximately 16,000 enrolled tribal members. According to the official website for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, this Lakota Nation is comprised of over three million acres of beautiful nature with three major waterways including the Missouri River, The Cheyenne River and The Moreau River located in central South Dakota.

C.R.S.T. Telephone Authority which is located in Eagle Butte, South Dakota provides telecommunication services to both commercial and residential customers located across the Cheyenne River Reservation. They are 100% wholly-owned by the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and began their formal organizational history in 1958 when the tribe purchased a privately owned telephone company. According to the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Telephone Authority website, they were the first tribal telephone company in the United States.

Currently, C.R.S.T. provides service to over 2,600 subscribers via voice, data and video services. Some recent initiatives include:

- In 2016 their team completed a $30,000,000 Fiber to the Premise project to all five exchanges in their study area, which was funded by a USDA Rural Utilities Service loan. This new infrastructure contained approximately 1,500 miles of fiber and replaced their old copper cable which was over 35 years old.
- Using their own funds and a grant from the Connect SD Broadband program, C.R.S.T. Telephone Authority completed a Fiber to the Premise project in 2019 for the town of Timber Lake.
- In 2020 the Board of Directors is planning to apply for the 2.5GHz spectrum that is available to Tribes and is currently assessing the opportunities available through this program.

C.R.S.T. primarily manages their own telecommunications systems and infrastructure, however, they also partner with Vantage Point Solutions as an engineering consultant. Their other primary partners include Calix for their communications platform and Juniper for their core switching products.

Tips on maximizing your membership

We've made the process of building your Policy & Procedure Manual easy!

TribalHub members have access to our Policy & Procedures Index which offers you downloadable Policy and Procedure templates for your entire IT department! We've made the process of building your Policy & Procedure Manual easy, simply download the samples and adjust to meet your own tribe's needs.

(Located in the Library section of the TribalHub Industry Information Portal)