

Commercial contractor
HCS builds customer
loyalty with

AT&T 5G mobile hotspots



- **Business needs** - Technology drives increasing numbers of processes in today's construction industry, but accessing robust and highly reliable connectivity on remote job sites was an ongoing problem for respected Texas commercial general contractor HCS, Inc.
- **Networking solution** - AT&T 5G mobile hotspots enable crews to access the specs, schedules, and other documents they need at the jobsite and make it easy to summon assistance in case of illness or injury.
- **Business value** - The mobile hotspots enhance worksite productivity and efficiency, enabling HCS to complete jobs more efficiently. The AT&T solution also supports efforts to protect workers on the job; worker safety is one of the company's core values.
- **Industry focus** - Construction
- **Size** - \$25 million in gross annual revenues

About HCS, Inc.

HCS Construction specializes in public and private general construction and construction management. With offices in Waco and Austin, the Texas company has earned a reputation for quality performance and integrity. Its employees strive to provide quality workmanship and deliver on-time.

The situation

Technology has dramatically changed the construction industry. Forward-thinking commercial general contractor HCS saw the value in using cloud-based applications on the job, but many worksites lacked the connectivity to deliver the programs and documents that workers needed.

Solution

AT&T equipped HCS crews with NETGEAR® Nighthawk 5G mobile hotspots that provide workers with fast and highly reliable network connectivity, both in 5G millimeter wave and 4G LTE coverage areas. The solution enables the company to keep work flowing smoothly, even when workers are far from

the office. Boosting efficiency and making it easier to complete projects on or before deadline helps the company continue to satisfy its customers.

Building a business from the ground up

HCS, Inc. has been active in the commercial general contracting industry for more than 30 years. The company was founded in 1989 by Carl Ballerino, who continues to play an active role as HCS president. He and his son, Mike Ballerino, the company director of construction, have built a solid business that has become a major competitor in the construction industry throughout and beyond Central Texas.

Initially focusing on building private homes, HCS found its sweet spot in commercial construction. “The majority of our client base consists of government, state, city, and county entities and school facilities—anywhere from elementary through college campuses,” Mike Ballerino said. “We primarily focus on Central Texas, but we’ve completed projects in Alaska, New York, New Jersey, Florida, California, Arizona, and everywhere in between.”

HCS’s portfolio is eclectic, with projects like schools and office complexes the company built from the ground up, major renovations to help organizations comply with state and federal regulations, and one-of-a-kind jobs, like building a U.S. Secret Service headquarters in Dallas and replacing part of the underwater infrastructure supporting a large New York dam.

The amount of repeat business it attracts is a testament to the quality of the company’s work



and the strong relationships it builds with clients. “It demonstrates our commitment to continually providing a quality job and on-time project completion,” Mike Ballerino said. “We really pride ourselves on several key aspects of this industry, such as a good reputation with our customers and a very strong safety record, which is very important to us as well. That continues to help us be successful.”

Safety, efficiency for workers in the field

As in most industries, technology has dramatically changed the face of construction. “When I first started, I had a flip phone,” Ballerino said. “Then we progressed to smartphones, tablets, and laptops.” By its very nature, the industry often operates in remote locations, and HCS is no exception. “Connectivity has always been an issue in the world of construction,” he said.

This presented a problem, since construction managers back at headquarters often needed to send change orders and other directives to superintendents and crews in the field. “Sometimes you’re in places with no service,” he said. “If there



“If you’re a 20-man crew on a job and you don’t have phone service, it can be bad if there’s an injury. Keeping a line of communication between a colleague and the office is an **important safety factor.**”

Mike Ballerino

Director of Construction, HCS, Inc.

were service, we were able to use our cell phones for tethering, but everyone knows that’s kind of limited based on how the service is, plans and rates. So, it’s always been a challenge for us.”

Without reliable access to the cloud-based programs and documents the workers needed to do their jobs, HCS relied on paper. “We had bookshelves full of big binders with all the specs that we’d have to take to the work sites,” he said.

In addition to making it easier for workers to do their jobs, Ballerino said he also wanted better connectivity for the health and safety of his workforce. Accidents are not uncommon in the construction industry, as construction workers perform tasks that may expose them to serious hazards. “If you’re a 20-man crew on a job and you don’t have phone coverage, it can be bad if there’s an injury,” he said. “Keeping a line of communication between a colleague and the office is an important safety factor.” For the safety of its workers and workplace efficiency, HCS needed a better way supply the connectivity its employees needed.

Enhanced connectivity and communication

AT&T, which launched the nation’s first commercial mobile 5G service late last year, equipped HCS crews with NETGEAR Nighthawk 5G mobile hotspots. Nighthawk is the first commercial device to support 5G mobile service using the millimeter wave spectrum (5G+) in AT&T 5G coverage areas.

The term 5G refers to the fifth generation of mobile communication. More than just offering faster speeds, 5G and particularly 5G+ enable a faster, smarter, and more responsive network that is likely to change the way companies do business. “We transfer a lot of data. Like, a lot. The 5G mobile hotspot is a great way for us to transfer these files, particularly on site, without bogging down our process,” Ballerino said. “With our two 5G mobile hotspots, we can keep workflows moving smoothly; perfect for when we’re out at a construction site and not in the office. That helps us get our jobs done faster than we could before.”

The AT&T solution has greatly improved HCS crews' ability to work from the field. "Our guys work mobile. They need data-intensive files, emails, schedules, and product submittals," he said. "They use different software platforms that we upload to the cloud, and if we don't have coverage, they can't access all the documents and folders." While the company tries to keep hard copies of most documents, he added, "This is not really a paper world anymore. We depend a lot on email and cloud-based platforms to conduct our business in a way that is productive."

Each HCS hotspot can connect up to 20 mobile devices, and when the workers are outside 5G coverage areas, the hotspots connect to current LTE networks. "Everyone's pretty tickled about the introduction of it," Ballerino said. "The AT&T mobile hotspots have been great. I would say they definitely have improved connectivity and communication. Overall, we've been quite excited."

The enhanced connectivity also provide peace of mind for safety-minded managers and staff. "You never know on a job site when something bad is going to happen," Ballerino said. "Now, when there's a challenge, when there's an injury, with connectivity we can get help. That's very valuable."

"AT&T values every customer"

Ballerino said he sees a big difference since HCS moved from another provider to AT&T years ago. "We've always been very satisfied with the general structure, network availability, and communication relationship. We feel that we're important to AT&T."

He said he appreciates the support he gets from his account team. "I know we're a small account, but it seems that AT&T values every customer. I've seen that with our account rep. I can text or call him day or night and he'll jump on it for me," he said.

HCS will count on AT&T as it continues to expand in Central Texas and throughout the U.S. "I am hopeful that the 5G network will support and promote growth here with us, with connectivity, flexibility, and availability," he said. "I think having connectivity available virtually everywhere, including in our offices, is really going to benefit us even more."

"The AT&T 5G mobile hotspots have been great. I would say they definitely have improved connectivity for large data files and communication."

Mike Ballerino

Director of Construction, HCS, Inc.