



A network you can bank on

- **Business needs** - The organization needed a more effective, stable network to support continuing growth.
- **Networking solution** - AT&T voice and data networking, transport, and management solutions enabled Wintrust to transform its network.
- **Business value** - Flexibility, stability, and enhanced security
- **Industry focus** - Financial services
- **Size** - More than \$45 billion in assets

About Wintrust

Wintrust Financial Corporation is a financial holding company with assets of over \$45 billion whose common stock is traded on the NASDAQ Global Select Market. Wintrust operates 15 community bank subsidiaries with over 180 banking locations in the greater Chicago and southern Wisconsin markets. Additionally, Wintrust operates various non-bank business units, including some that provide commercial and life insurance premium financing in the United States, a premium finance company operating in Canada, and several others.

The situation

Wintrust IT officials wanted to enhance their data and voice networks. They reached out to top-tier providers for proposals that would help them build a best-in-class IT organization and an ecosystem of strategic suppliers to support the bank's operations today and pave the way for continuing expansion.

Solution

AT&T Business helped Wintrust transform its network. First, Wintrust opted for AT&T VPN service for highly secure, scalable, and reliable connectivity. The company also chose AT&T IP Flexible Reach and AT&T IP Toll-free services to support its expanding business. In addition, it included an array of other transport and network management services to strengthen its infrastructure.



Wintrust customers have it all

Wintrust was founded in a Chicago suburb in 1991 by current CEO Ed Wehmer. He created an alternative to big banks. Over the past 25 years it has become the second largest bank in Chicago. But they don't act like a big bank. Instead, they follow the "have it all" model. Wintrust offers the resources and tools of a large company with the personal attention and the focus customers expect from a smaller, local establishment.

Its banks, companies, and divisions specialize in a variety of services to make Wintrust a one-stop shop for any financial need, including traditional retail and commercial banking services, wealth management, and commercial and life insurance.

From its earliest days, the company has been dedicated to diversity, inclusivity, and having a positive impact in the communities it serves. It works in partnership with other organizations and individuals to support goals and causes that will improve the quality of life in the areas it serves.

Wintrust Chief Technology Officer and Senior Vice President Michael Lambert said the company's relationship-based approach is responsible for much of its success. "It's not about the transactions," he said. "Our organization is based on creating, nurturing, and maintaining relationships."

Building relationships builds business

The philosophy, which applies to Wintrust's internal culture as well, has driven phenomenal growth. "In the 14 years I've been with the organization, I've seen it grow from \$7 billion in assets to more than \$45 billion," Lambert said. "And it's gone from about 1,000 employees to over 5,300. And we're still growing. I'd say it's very successful."

Wintrust supports businesses of all sizes but has a special connection with small businesses. "We are one of the leaders in the state of Illinois with the Small Business Administration," Lambert said. "We have a portfolio of financial services to serve individuals and any size organization."

The bank has worked hard to become a community asset. “We ingrain ourselves in the communities in which we operate,” Lambert said. “We host community events, provide financial education courses, and sponsor local events. We do neighborhood cookouts and sit on community boards. As a result, we know you when you walk through our door. It’s a personal relationship, not just a numeric transaction.”

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Michael Lambert
Chief Technology Officer and Senior Vice President,
Wintrust

Improving accuracy and efficiency

Technology is an important aspect of Wintrust operations. As Wintrust’s Chief Technology Officer, Lambert assists the bank’s Chief Information Officer in researching new technology and making strategic decisions for its technology initiatives. He also serves as Director of Research and Development for the corporate infrastructure.

“We provide a means to conduct research to discover and test solutions, enabling the business lines to make more informed decisions for future direction and initiatives,” he said. “Before we make the decision to

purchase a solution, we want to know that it does what we expect it to do.”

An important part of Wintrust’s “have it all” philosophy is staying on the cutting edge of technology. That way, it can offer customers the resources of a large bank while providing service-based community banking.

Wintrust adopts technologies that can improve accuracy and efficiency. That allows its employees to respond quicker to customer inquiries, giving them more time to devote to customer service. “Anytime that we’re able to pass through efficiencies of speed and accuracy, it’s a win-win for our Wintrust operations and for our customers,” Lambert said.

Innovating relationship-based service

Lambert said Wintrust invests in best-in-class technology to constantly improve the experience for the bank’s internal and external customers. “We want to ensure that our services are stable and resilient and provide all that our customers want and expect from working with our organization,” he said.

But making technology decisions is complicated by various constraints and, for the past year, by COVID-19. “The pandemic really put technology at the forefront in continuing to provide what our customers have come to expect from Wintrust,” Lambert said.

“How do we still provide that relationship-based service when we’re no longer face to face?” Lambert said. “How do we enable our employee base to continue to work in a collaborative fashion that we’ve come to expect? And how do we make it happen in a short period of time—all while we’re not in the office?”

As the pandemic began spreading, Wintrust searched for the best way to equip its workforce of 5,300 to begin serving customers remotely.

Overcoming infrastructure difficulties

Security is a top priority for Wintrust. As the financial institution grew, officials wanted to ensure stable and consistent network performance and prevent any points of failure. “That’s what led us to look for a new partner,” Lambert said.

Wintrust met with several providers to discuss potential solutions. They were looking for a provider with vast, cross-industry expertise combined with a deep understanding of their options.

“That’s how we gain knowledge and understanding of the offerings that are out there and which may be suitable for Wintrust,” Lambert said. “We leaned heavily on the expertise of AT&T Business. Because of the size and scope of the company and the different industries and customers that they work with, they understood our challenges.”

A network transformation

The bank chose AT&T Business to design and deploy a robust, highly secure, best-in-class network. It now uses AT&T Virtual Private Network (VPN), a network that connects remote sites almost anywhere in the world. AT&T VPN is also isolated from the public internet to keep cyber criminals at bay. The bank now processes transactions with speed and security through the AT&T Global Network.

“We were able to transform our network and within a 30-day period ensure that our entire 5,000 plus employee base was able to work remotely,” Lambert said. The reliable network also enabled Wintrust to support its customers’ applications for federal Payroll Protection Program (PPP) funds. Wintrust handled more than 19,500 PPP loans, processing over \$4.8 billion in funding. In fact, it has been recognized as one of the nation’s top banking institutions for its support of the PPP program.

The company also chose AT&T IP Flexible Reach and AT&T IP Toll-Free services. These managed Voice over IP (VoIP) services help optimize network capacity, simplify network management, and control costs. “AT&T IP Flexible Reach allows us to use the technology that we’ve put in place for software-defined networking,” Lambert said. The services enabled Wintrust to move away from legacy phone lines to elevate how they work together to serve customers.

A solid, stable platform

The solutions have also improved Wintrust network operations. “First and foremost is the stability,” Lambert said. “Especially from the AT&T VPN perspective, the network has been a solid, stable platform. And we are not experiencing the number or length of outages that we had with previous networks.”

He also values the network’s resiliency. “If we do have issues, most of our locations and endpoints are not impacted because of the resilient network that we’ve implemented,” he said. “The network stays up and active so staff can continue their work and interactions with their customers. Those were two primary benefits we were looking for, and it’s been a huge success.”

Lambert appreciates being able to call on AT&T Business for information and advice. “We have gained additional benefits from the standpoint of subject matter expertise and we’ve been able to leverage the AT&T technology expertise, which has been great. And the sales and relationship management side of things has also been great.”

A relationship of trust

Members of Wintrust’s leadership and technology teams benefited from time spent learning about the new network from experts at AT&T Business. “We relied heavily on their expertise through discussions and meetings,” Lambert said. “That way everybody had a good understanding of what was being proposed, why it was being proposed, and how it could be deployed and executed with minimal disruption or downtime to establish a solid network going forward.”

He called AT&T Business a trusted vendor that he will call on again to discuss future projects. “I think one of the great things about our relationship is that we don’t expect AT&T to take on a project just to have the business,” he said. “They’ll tell us when something isn’t their forte and suggest another supplier that may be good to work with.”

With an enhanced network structure, Lambert sees Wintrust as future-flexible, with a foundation to enjoy many advantages from the core network infrastructure it has built with AT&T Business.



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