WhyHunger: Connecting the Hungry With the Food They Need Using Twilio Flex, Built By Vision Point Systems

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Overview:

WhyHunger is a nonprofit working to end hunger and advance the human right to nutritious food in the U.S. They provide critical resources to support grassroots movements and fuel community solutions rooted in social, environmental, racial and economic justice.

Challenge:

WhyHunger has two call center work streams that are vital resources to those in need: the WhyHunger Hotline and Hungerthon. The previous platform that supported these call centers was severely underperforming, costly, and lacked self-service capabilities. Calls were being dropped, sound quality was poor, and metrics were inaccurate.

Solution:

Vision Point Systems (VPS) built out call center solutions unique to WhyHunger's needs that simultaneously saved on costs. The team implemented Twilio Flex for the WhyHunger Hotline and annual Hungerthon, providing a more streamlined and cost-effective call center with reliable metrics, as well as a better experience for those calling in.

Customer Spotlight:
WhyHunger

Vision Point Systems' Twilio Flex Contact Center Software integration for WhyHunger has improved accessibility to food for millions around the U.S., decreasing frustration in waiting time, while increasing adaptability and responsiveness to grassroots needs in eliminating hunger. New York City-based nonprofit WhyHunger has an essential mission: help those in need around the United States to find food.

WhyHunger provides critical resources to support grassroots movements and fuel community solutions rooted in social, environmental, racial and economic justice. They work to end hunger and advance the human right to nutritious food in the U.S. A key piece of accomplishing WhyHunger's mission is its accessibility for those in need. Call centers are particularly necessary in reaching those who would benefit from WhyHunger's service.

Before partnering with VPS, WhyHunger had adopted a phone platform that neither met the needs of the WhyHunger team nor those calling in. The system was characterized by dropped calls, expensive costs for unused services, poor sound quality, and lack of reliable metrics. The need for a more cost-effective and customizable self-service call center solution was undeniable.

Connecting People to Food With the Help of Call Centers

WhyHunger's mission is to end hunger.

Easy access to resources and information for all is a vital piece of their purpose. WhyHunger's call center enables this connection. WhyHunger needed a call center that would be centralized, provide clear data about incoming calls, and have the flexibility to scale up and down as needed. Flexibility and data help WhyHunger understand and provide resources where they are needed most to maximize impact and save costs, while ensuring they are there to make the connection when it's most necessary.

Photo Credit: whyhunger.org

WhyHunger already had a partnership with Twilio for a texting service, and wanted to expandthat relationship through a grant offered by Twilio. Due to the past satisfaction with Twilio's service and the grant opportunity, WhyHunger identified Twilio as a strong fit for their call center. Twilio then recommended Vision Point Systems to work with WhyHunger to implement TwilioFlex.

VPS quickly set to work, noting WhyHunger's strategic needs for their call center and coming up with creative solutions.

Photo Credit: whyhunger.com

VPS understood that WhyHunger needed two different call center workstreams:

The WhyHunger Hotline

- VPS needed to develop a contact center solution for WhyHunger's hotline. The WhyHunger hotline is available Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 6 PM EST, and refers people in need across the U.S. to food pantries, soup kitchens, summer meals sites, government nutrition programs and grassroots organizations, especially those that provide access to nutritious foods and nutritional support services.

- Those seeking their nearest food resource can call 1(800)-5-HUNGRY to access the WhyHunger call center. Once connected with an advocate at WhyHunger, a caller shares their location and the advocate will share local options to find the closest food resource. VPS conceptualized and developed solutions unique to the WhyHunger Hotline, such as an improved IVR (Interactive Voice Response), dialpad zip code search functionality, voicemail recordings, improved data collection, and data-based efficiencies on the agent side to improve both the user-facing and agent-facing experience.

Hungerthon

For Hungerthon, VPS focused on ensuring callers were properly routed and that WhyHunger had agent flexibility to increase overall efficiency.

- **Hungerthon is an annual phone drive that WhyHunger runs around Thanksgiving to take in food donations. The Hungerthon campaign dates back to 1975. It simultaneously educates radio-listeners about human needs and fundraises to end American hunger.**
- **After Hungerthon 2020, the WhyHunger team realized it was time for a change after encountering continuous issues on the previous call center platform, such as missing data, poor sound quality, regularly dropped calls, and high costs of service. Based on their experience with the previous call center platform, the WhyHunger team knew what they needed in a new solution.**
- **VPS created a system so that a caller can dial the same number, but people could actually get routed to the right agent depending on their intent: Hotline or Hungerthon. The VPS team also reduced WhyHunger's agent seats costs, setting them up to only pay for what is needed and scaling up seats for Hungerthon. Hungerthon was much more efficient, cost-effective, and easier to manage with the new VPS-implemented Twilio Flex solution in place.**

WhyHunger's Call Center: Reimagined and Revamped

Vision Point Systems planned, conceptualized, and built the entire new call center platform through Twilio Flex for WhyHunger. The VPS team walked the WhyHunger team through the options, capabilities, and processes to make the most of their new call center platform.

"Since implementation, VPS's solution Twilio Flex has made things flow better. Especially during a time when we are working from home, having everything in one spot helps ustrain our team easily."

Patricia Rojas, Database Manager, at WhyHunger

Photo Credit: whyhunger.org

VPS's Innovative Call Center Solutions:

Improved Interactive Voice Response (IVR)

- **IVR creates an automated response that allows callers to access information through pre-recorded messages. The IVR that Twilio Flex offers triages calls much more efficiently and effectively. This new IVR approach has been the bedrock of the new Twilio Flex setup. It has been set up with unique routing options for both the WhyHunger Hotline and Hungerthon.**

"Honestly [the IVR] has been so helpful when we have to close the hotline down. People in need still get the information they need and we do not need to be open. The ability to serve two languages is great, we can send the Spanish calls to people that speak Spanish."

Patricia Rojas, Database Manager at WhyHunger

Dialpad Zip Code Search Functionality

- **Focusing on the end user of the WhyHunger Hotline, the callers calling in to find where their closest food bank is located, VPS added the ability to enter a zip code using the dialpad. This makes it super simple for those seeking a food bank to quickly find a resource, while simultaneously keeping costs down for WhyHunger by relying less on agents to answer questions.**

Hotline + Hungerthon Agent Seat Cost Savings

- **Twilio Flex's Active Agent Hour pricing model allows WhyHunger to only pay for what they actually use. Instead of having to pay for agent seats even when they go unused, WhyHunger can pay for as many agents as needed at a given time.**

Voicemail Recordings

- **WhyHunger's Contact Center can also take voicemails in case all agents are busy at the moment. Voicemails are recorded in their system and also automatically added to a Google sheet with the date, time, link to the voicemail, and phone number that called in to create a record of a voicemail.**

Single Sign-On

- **VPS implemented single sign-on to create a simple way to add and manage agents.**

Agent Skills Coding

- **VPS created "agent skills", which identifies agents that are specific to handling either Hungerthon calls, regular inquiries, or WhyHunger Hotline calls to more effectively route calls and determine the best agent to take them.**

Improved Data Collection

- **A custom survey was built so that WhyHunger could begin to capture demographic data on their calls. Additionally, VPS built custom metrics powered by Twilio Insights to better understand and manage the WhyHunger contact center.**

Innovating with VPS and Twilio Flex to Feed America

The new call center solution through Twilio Flex has helped the WhyHunger team find real solutions to ending hunger - via both the WhyHunger Hotline and Hungerthon. The WhyHunger team has seen key outcomes for their nonprofit, particularly around cost-savings and fundraising

Driving Donations During Hungerthon:

In 2021 after implementing Twilio Flex, the 36th Hungerthon brought in over $920,000 to help solve hunger in America. Hungerthon reached listeners via Audacy New York, SiriusXM, and iHeartMedia New York. Celebrity supporters like Bruce Springsteen, Yoko Ono Lennon, and Tiffany Haddish helped promote the cause. The public participated through radio broadcasts, auctions, social media, and donations.

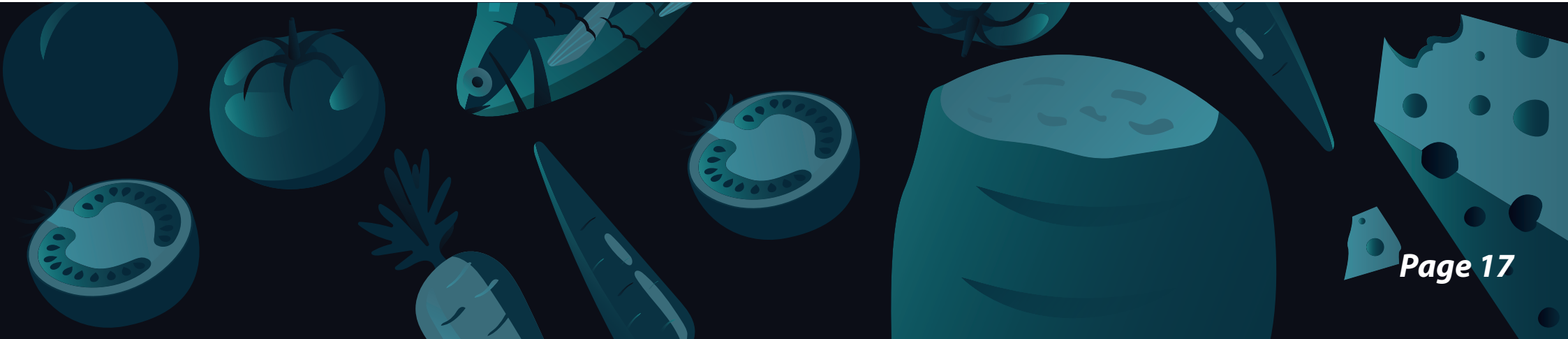
Photo Credit: whyhunger.org

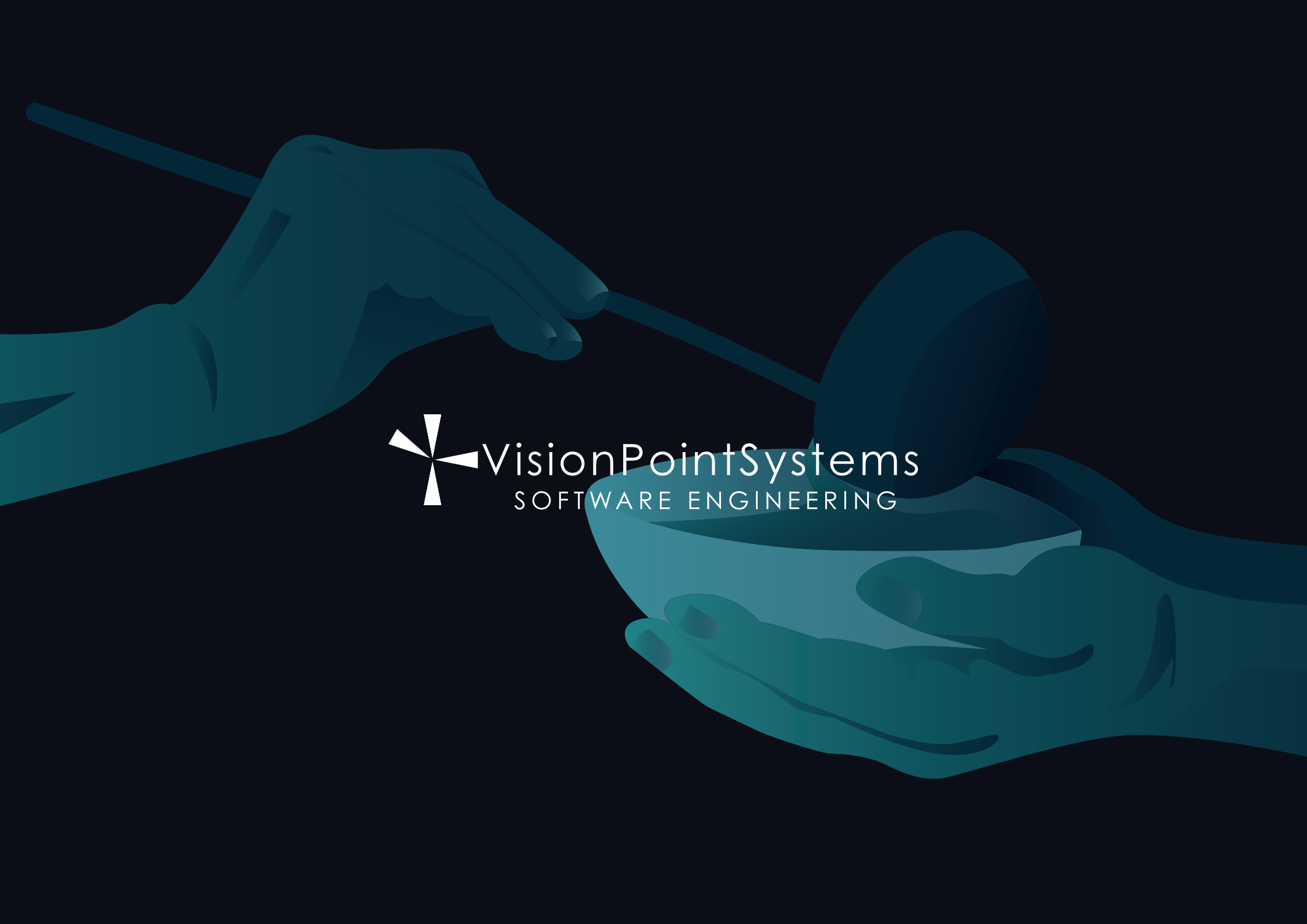
The drive's success was made possible thanks to having a reliable call center for the Hungerthon, as well as the ability to scale and train agents up easily to manage the call volume for the fundraiser.

Improved Hotline Efficiency, Metrics, and Training

The WhyHunger Hotline has seen improvements to its regular operations and its caller experience since the VPS implementation of Twilio Flex. The Hotline can better track demographic, call timing, and outcomes as a result of custom metrics created by VPS. This has helped WhyHunger save on the costs of the hotline, by only paying for what they need, when they need it. Agent routing is more efficient, while agent training and onboarding is even quicker. WhyHunger can also now help more people calling the hotline more often due to voicemail functionality and Interactive Voice Response options when all agents are busy or the hotline is down.

Overall, the WhyHunger team's new and improved call center helps not only the WhyHunger team save on costs and more efficiently manage their call intake, but helps those in need around the U.S. find their closest food resource faster and simpler.

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