Dialpad | *The Second City*

Taking improv comedy to new heights

Why Second City ditched its PBX and moved to the cloud

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY SECOND CITY

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Sparking laughter in theatres across the globe

Second City has been bringing the funny on and off the stage for over 50 years. With roots as a tiny comedy theatre, the business has since evolved into a premier sketch comedy brand.

From Tina Fey to Stephen Colbert and Steve Carell, a host of famous alumni have kickstarted careers beneath its theatre's spotlights. And with touring ensembles, training centers, and theatres across the globe, the brand has successfully elevated improv comedy to the international stage.

Second City's Favorite Features

- Calling, Messaging, Video, and SMS— all in one place
- Multi-device functionality
- Intuitive user management
- Seamless deployment & onboarding
- Automatic updates & feature releases
- A tight Google Apps for Work integration

An Aging Phone System

In recent years, Second City has focused on building a cloud-based network to support global expansion. The company's first foray to the cloud was adopting Google Apps for Work in 2011.

But one element of its IT infrastructure—an archaic phone system—was still decades behind schedule.

Then, in August of 2015, Second City experienced a fire that began at the base of headquarters in downtown Chicago. Flames shot through the three-story limestone building, leaving a gaping chasm on the roof and wiping out its entire administrative infrastructure. Within hours, the company's data center—home to its PBX phone system—was gone.

The team's immediate concern was finding a way to communicate with customers.

Second City outsources its IT operations to SAGIN, LLC. Dan Wagner, SAGIN's IT manager for Second City, quickly turned to Dialpad for help.

Five days after the fire, Second City traded the remnants of its charred PBX for the cloud, installing Dialpad on desk phones, computers, and mobile devices.

With the support of deployment engineers from Cloudbakers, a preferred Dialpad partner, IT provisioned users and kickstarted the porting process. Cloudbakers also provided in-depth trainings across departments.

To the delight of Second City's workforce, Dialpad instantly modernized the company's aging IT infrastructure.

In under a week, Dan's team cut cords and enabled teams traveling the world to go 100% mobile.

"Whether you're a small business or a big business, your phone system is your lifeline."

— Dan Wagner, IT Manager

Clunky Hardware & Costly Maintenance

Prior to Dialpad, the complexity of Second City's PBX forced IT to spend hundreds of dollars an hour paying third parties to provision users, adjust settings, and upgrade the system.

From a management standpoint, it was a costly and inefficient cycle. The PBX was also difficult to scale, especially for a company with teams scattered worldwide.

"We would have to call in a contractor to install lines, go through the process of running them, basically make things work with older technology," explained Dan.

Fortunately, Dialpad eliminated these headaches altogether. By concentrating communications in the cloud, Second City cut its dependency on third-party support.

"With Dialpad, you plug in and go. It's a beautiful thing, not having to micromanage a system. I can ask someone to provision a line and it's done in five minutes flat," said Dan.

The chaos of onboarding new employees and dealing with upgrades is now a thing of the past. IT, no longer burdened by a clunky system, now relies on a service that offers a polished experience for admins and users alike.

"Upgrades happen automatically— we never worry about whether our server's out-of-date, or if we need updates for a new piece of software."

For Dan's team, ease-of-use, a missing puzzle piece with their old PBX, made the choice even simpler. "Everything is integrated within one dashboard on the desktop and mobile apps. The UX is elegant, straightforward, and easy to navigate—definite selling points for us."

"I think any IT administrator is always trying to look to the future. A traditional PBX was simply not the best tool for us to do that."

— Dan Wagner, IT Manager

The Fire That Changed Everything

Second City's headquarters is located in a historic, maze-like building in the heart of downtown Chicago. On August 26th, 2015, a blaze ignited from the grease chute of a restaurant at ground level, scorching Second City's executive offices and releasing dense smoke that swept across three floors.

"It was devastating. The building that got damaged the most housed our entire data center. And it wasn't just the fire itself, it was the smoke, the water, everything spread through the building."

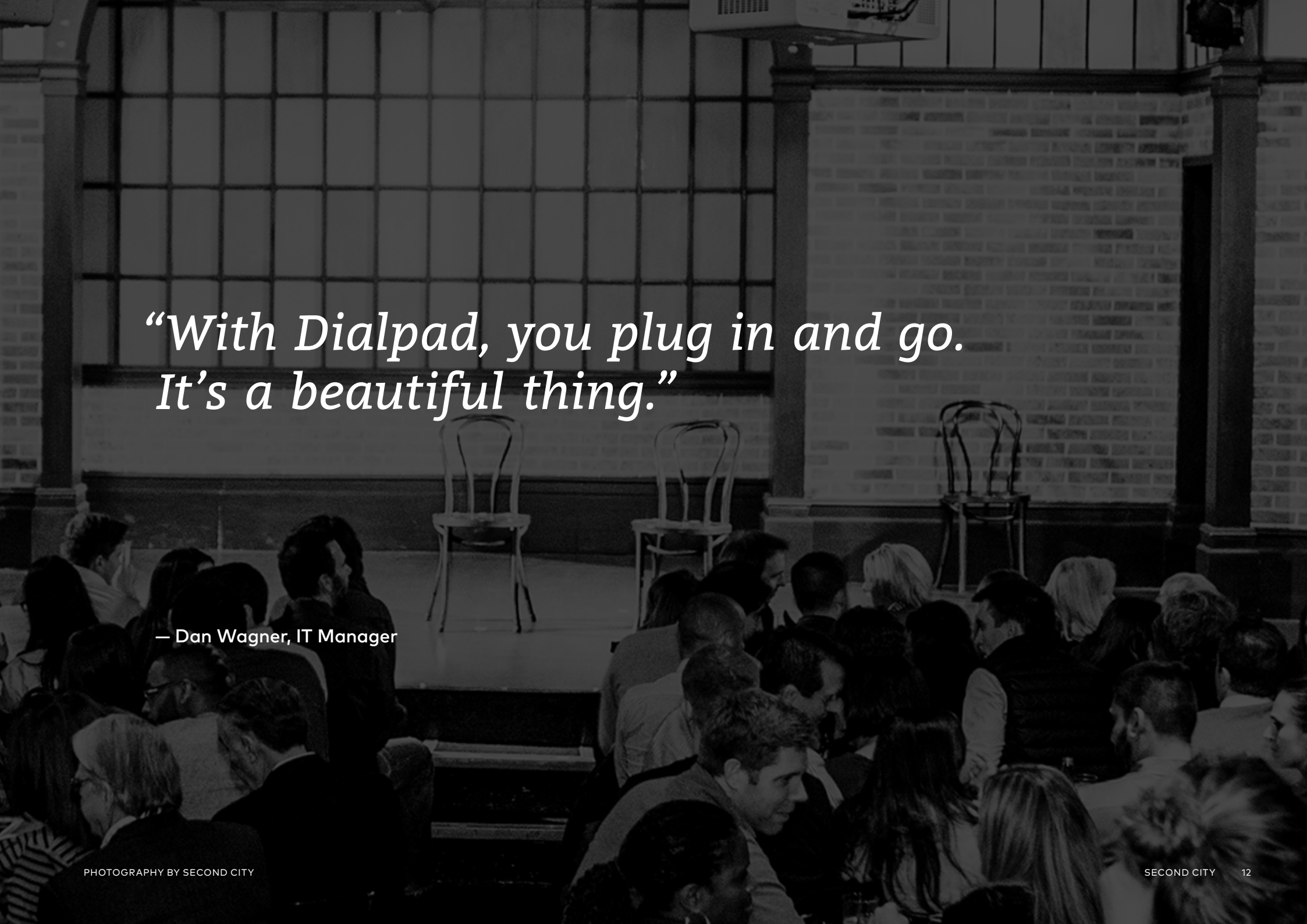According to Dan, all aspects of the business were heavily impacted.
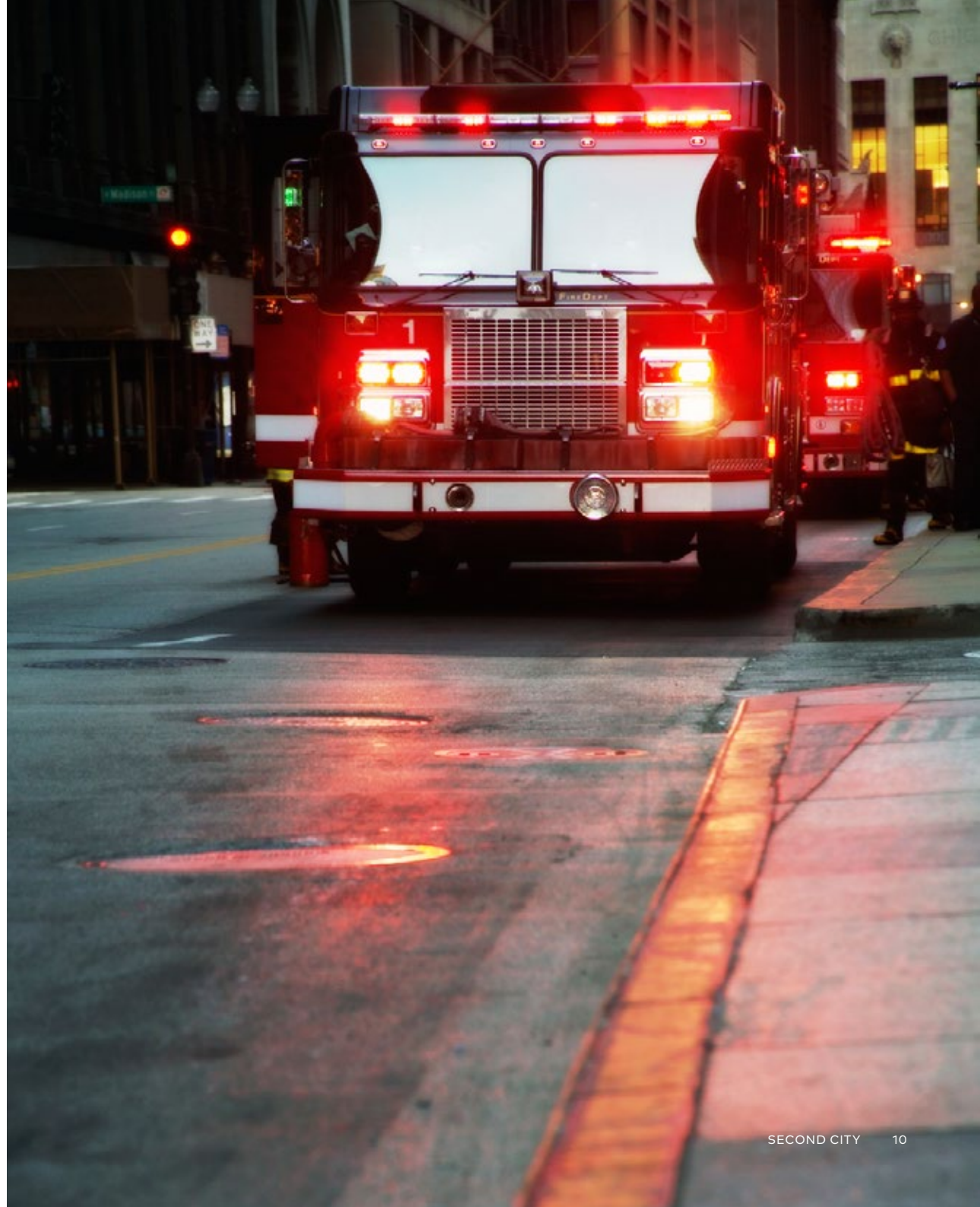
That night, Second City's team jumped into crisis management mode.

"One of the things that came up immediately was—'How are we going to reach out to our customers? How are our people going to contact us?'"

Without an email database to tap into, Dan's team realized that the only avenue of contact they had was Second City's phone number.

But with their old PBX destroyed, the team needed a flexible phone system that could take its place and scale rapidly. That's when they looked to Dialpad.

"With Dialpad, you plug in and go.
It's a beautiful thing."

— Dan Wagner, IT Manager

Modernizing IT
After the Meltdown

"After the fire, it was chaotic. We were doing a lot of fancy footwork trying to forward numbers," explained Dan.

Before Dialpad was deployed, the team had a few days with zero human to human contact. Departments were forced to either field calls from personal cell phones or send customers straight to voicemail.

"It was hairy, it was really crazy trying to manage the phone lines—we basically had a script on repeat saying 'Please email us,'" said Dan.

A couple days after the fire, Second City found a temporary office space in downtown Chicago, about a mile from headquarters.

Dialpad instantly created a telephony network that scaled across the two locations.

"The temporary office had normal phones on every desk, but we were able to forward those lines to any number within Dialpad. It was very, very exciting for everyone."

To the relief of Dan's team, within a week, the entire company was on Dialpad.

"We were up and running in five business days. It was impressive. We had this opportunity to re-engineer, to prepare ourselves for the next 50 years, and we took it," said Dan.

"*The speed at which we deployed Dialpad was remarkable. It was a lightening-fast change management campaign.*"

— Dan Wagner, IT Manager

Refreshingly Easy User Management

For Second City's IT team, Dialpad's easy to use interface is game-changing. With the old PBX, they struggled with a fragmented ecosystem that made admin tasks extremely difficult. But with Dialpad, managing users now takes seconds versus hours.

"Say we hire somebody and need to provision a new phone. Before, we had to sit down, log into a separate server, click around, set up voicemail…it was a very arduous process," Dan explained.

Nowadays, provisioning a user takes Dan four clicks—"I create the account, refresh my page, and there it is. Not only do we save money, we also significantly cut down on using IT resources."

Another perk of moving to the cloud came in the shape of Second City's company directory. Prior to Dialpad, teams relied on a static spreadsheet that was printed out, posted on desks, and manually updated. Dan had to cross-reference it with the old PBX on a regular basis—it was a mess.

For Second City, "the ability to search for users within Dialpad is huge. It's amazing that I can now update a user via Google Apps and instantly, anyone can type their name into Dialpad and call or message them," said Dan.

"The integration with Google Apps is a lifesaver. And as a user, not having to fumble with a directory, having it live within the application, is incredible."

"*Modern cloud solutions are infinitely flexible—you really can set up anywhere and still do your job.*"

— Dan Wagner, IT Manager

Cutting Cords and Going Mobile

Thanks to Dialpad, Second City now supports a vast network of on-the-go business phones. By launching a war on wires, IT conveniently freed employees from their offices.

Whether on desktops or mobile devices, teams can now engage with customers from just about anywhere. Dialpad rings multiple devices at once and lets users shift conversations between them with a single click.

"It's way better than just forwarding calls to your cell phone. It's actually the whole business phone experience that follows you," Dan explained.

The upside? Dialpad's mobility means Second City employees are far more excited to interact with the phone system. By making it easy to customize settings like *business hours* and *do not disturb*, Dialpad gives users full control over their conversations.

"We had this opportunity to re-engineer, to prepare ourselves for the next 50 years, and we took it."

— Dan Wagner, IT Manager

"In today's day and age, we're always on the move, we're always finding new ways to stay connected. With Dialpad, we never worry about going mobile and leaving our business phones behind," said Dan.

By centralizing Second City's calling, messaging, video, and SMS in the cloud, Dialpad is now a company-wide communications hub.

"Our teams have the same experience on their cell phones as they would at their desks—it's incredible."

Communications for a Modern Workplace

"Every department in Chicago, from our box office to our training center uses Dialpad. It's been a very eye-opening experience to see how flexible everyone has become," said Dan.

For Second City, the real benefit to using Dialpad was not only cutting costs, but giving employees the freedom to collaborate from anywhere, across any device.

"No matter where our users are in the world, we can use Dialpad to manage communications with infinite flexibility," explained Dan.

The days of tangled cords, third party vendors, and clunky hardware are long gone. Dialpad has turned the concept of a business phone system on its head, enabling IT to manage users with ease while providing employees with a tool that's equal parts functional and delightful.

"While the fire was sad and devastating for all of us, I think the outcome of what happened because of it has been fantastic," said Dan.

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Dialpad is communications for the modern workplace, delivering an experience that employees and administrators love. Available on any device, anywhere, Dialpad includes voice, video, group messaging, SMS, MMS, mobile VoIP, conferencing, screen sharing, document sharing, and integrations with Microsoft Office 365 and Google Apps for Work. A pure cloud solution, Dialpad enables a new office communications system to be completely up and running in a matter of minutes. [Learn more](#)

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