

# TANDBERG CUSTOMER PROFILE

## Yuba City Fire Department



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DEVIN BARBER  
INFORMATION SYSTEMS MANAGER  
CITY OF YUBA CITY

### THE CHALLENGE

About 60,000 people live in and around Yuba City, California, located just north of the state capital, Sacramento. The local fire department operates 5 stations throughout the district, which is spread over 30 square miles. As with most jurisdictions across the U.S., local, state and federal mandates require a great deal of specialized training for fire fighters and law enforcement officers. Yuba City's challenges were finding a way to keep first responders closer to their own stations in case they needed to respond to an emergency during training, and reducing the time and cost of training the district's fire and police department personnel.

"In late 2001, Yuba City Fire Department merged with another local department, taking us from three to five stations," said Chief Marc Boomgaarden. "It quickly became a challenge to manage the logistics involved with getting everyone from each station together for training. When fire fighters couldn't make it, we'd have to pay overtime for them to take the training later, and we'd also incur the cost of getting the trainer in again."

In addition to the difficulty of coordinating all personnel for a single training session, the chief was concerned about providing the best emergency response to the citizens of Yuba City and the surrounding area while training was in progress.

"During training sessions, fire fighters may be many miles from their respective stations," Boomgaarden said. "We needed to find a way to train our staff closer to their geographic area of responsibility so our response times could be minimized. And, if we could cut costs and be more efficient with our fire fighters' time, that would be icing on the cake."

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### THE SOLUTION

Shortly after the merger in 2001, Yuba City officials began looking into video communication as a way to reach across the community and tie the fire stations together. An evaluation was conducted with three video communication vendors: TANDBERG, Polycom and Vtel. Department heads from all city departments viewed presentations by all three vendors to compare the quality, functionality and benefits of each system. As a result of those demonstrations, Yuba City chose TANDBERG.

"The main reasons we selected TANDBERG," said Devin Barber, Information Systems Manager, City of Yuba City, "were the superior picture quality and additional features that made operating the TANDBERG systems easier and more intuitive for our users."

"When we sat down and started evaluating the solutions," Barber explained, "we had no preconceived notions about which product was best; we had only our functional requirements in mind. In a room full of non-technical people, there was a dramatic reaction when the TANDBERG picture came up. You heard 'Oohs' and 'Aahs' right away because the quality and clarity were so much better than the others."

With the selection of TANDBERG finalized, Yuba City purchased six systems — two 2500s and three 550s for the fire stations and City Hall, and a portable 6000 for the police department. The City also constructed a central classroom at Fire Headquarters and installed a TANDBERG Educator as the tool for providing simultaneous training for all fire department personnel. The Educator Series includes an intuitive, color TouchPanel and all of the components needed to create a fully interactive distance education classroom.

"Up until now, we had to pay an instructor to conduct several sessions — first on the west side, then on the east," Boomgaarden said. "Now we can just bring in the expert once and train everyone in the same session. We can also record the training so that if someone is unable to attend, they can view the missed session later."

Along with task-specific training for first responders, Yuba City's Human Resources group also conducts periodic internal training with the same benefit. "The H.R. trainer doesn't have to travel from site to site," said Boomgaarden. "He or she can simply go to the central classroom and conduct interactive instruction with all stations in one session."

Training via videoconference also ensures consistency in the material presented as well as the approach. "All participants have the same training experience at the same time, reducing the possibility of mix-ups in the line of duty," said Boomgaarden. "Video-training builds camaraderie, too, as all trainees have the advantage of hearing the questions and answers posed from other locations during each session."

Police Chief Richard Doscher, who oversees a force of about 80 Yuba City Police employees, also uses a TANDBERG system. "Because of the state's budget problems, we've been told that we won't receive any training reimbursements — even for mandatory training — through the end of our fiscal year," Doscher said. "We used to send people to distant cities for training, wherever they could get the best instruction in the state. Because we now have videoconferencing available to us, it provides us an alternative to costly off-site education."

In addition to training, Doscher points to the value of video communication during a crisis. "We have a Situation Room within the Police Facility, which is really built around our TANDBERG system. In the event of a wide-scale emergency, senior city leadership can monitor whatever is going on in the city, the region or the state, and manage the emergency response to it," he said.

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To connect the endpoints, the City uses fiber optic cable for four systems and wireless spread spectrum for two others. "Spread spectrum" refers to the practice of sending small pieces of information simultaneously over a series of frequencies across the spectrum. In Yuba City's case, the wireless signal is broadcast about 2½ miles.

According to Barber, speed-to-implementation was another major benefit of working with TANDBERG. "Something that was quite refreshing is how quick and easy setup was," Barber said. "This equipment was designed to work on IP. When we got it hooked up, we gave it an IP address, and it just worked. That was very nice. Too often you spend a lot of time up front configuring technical equipment to work in a specific environment, but with the TANDBERG system it just worked the way it was supposed to the first time. We were all glad to see that."

### THE FUTURE

Yuba City plans to expand its use of video communication to other city facilities in the future, including the Public Works building and water treatment plants. Additionally, according to Chief Boomgaarden, Yuba City would like to connect with adjacent counties to increase the region's response potential in the event of a large-scale disaster.

"This area experiences periodic flooding because of our proximity to the Yuba and Feather Rivers," Fire Chief Boomgaarden said. "With this kind of natural threat — or even a man-made disaster, for that matter — we can benefit from tying together multiple Emergency Operations Centers via videoconferencing to help formulate the most effective response in a wide-scale emergency."

"For us the bottom line is this: With videoconferencing, we'll be able to more effectively handle those emergencies and reach out to the communities around us because of the unified prevention-and-preparation training we've all experienced together," Boomgaarden said. "As more and more agencies are able to acquire videoconferencing, we'll all get more value from the systems."

Police Chief Doscher agreed. "We hope that more people across the state will be able to benefit from this great tool," he said. "There's just no substitute for being able to look someone in the eyes to aid in good, clear communication."

TANDBERG WORLD HEADQUARTERS  
Philip Pedersens vei 22  
1366 Lysaker, Norway  
Tel: +47 67 125 125  
Fax: +47 67 125 234  
Video: +47 67 117 777  
E-mail: [tandberg@tandberg.net](mailto:tandberg@tandberg.net)

200 Park Avenue, Suite 2005  
New York, NY U.S.A. 10166  
Tel: +1 212 692 6500  
Tel: +1 800 538 2884 (toll free in the U.S.)  
Fax: +1 212 692 6501  
Video: +1 212 692 6535  
E-mail: [tandberg@tandbergusa.com](mailto:tandberg@tandbergusa.com)

[www.tandberg.net](http://www.tandberg.net)