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THE ARIZONA CITY LEADING A DIGITAL FRONTIER

DIGITAL REPORT

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City CIOs Scott Conn and Paul Poledna explain how AI chatbots, cloud-based ERP resources and smart utility tools are transforming Mesa's infrastructure

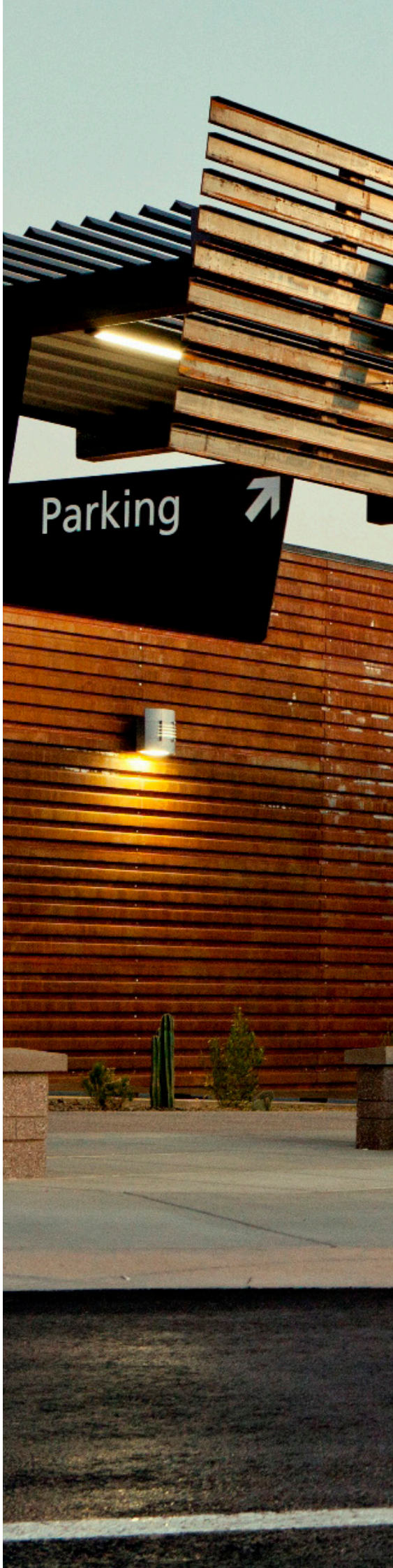
Within Arizona's the Valley of the Sun, the City of Mesa is setting the pace for municipalities across the United States with its digital transformation tools and strategies. Sitting at the centre of this technological frontier is Scott Conn, Mesa's Chief Information Officer, and Paul Poledna, Assistant CIO. Scott famously looks the part of a modern trailblazer, frequently sporting a classic cowboy hat, a fitting nod to the American Southwest.

But in Mesa, being a cowboy isn't about wild-west lawlessness. Scott's spirit aligns more with that of a pioneer. It's a mindset of grit, independence and a fearless willingness to venture into uncharted territory before anyone else.

From AI-driven citizen services and regional tech alliances to cybersecurity triumphs, Scott and Paul share the strategic partnerships and bold philosophies that are driving one of America's top digital cities.

Mesa, the trend setter

The city's ability to stay ahead of the curve is rooted in a collaborative environment that genuinely values cutting-edge tech.




PHOENIX-MESA GATEWAY AIRPORT

"One of the great things about being in Mesa is we have a city council and a city manager's office that is extremely supportive of technology and of IT in particular," Scott proudly states.

"We call ourselves the Department of Innovation and Technology, otherwise known as 'DoIT'. Now, a lot of other city departments are starting to call themselves DoIT.

"I just want to make it clear: Mesa was the first. I'm absolutely honoured and flattered that people want to copy what we're doing with the name, but it is an accurate description of what we do here in Mesa.

"With the city council's support, we are able to experiment with things other cities are uncomfortable doing. In my prior two cities, they had more of a philosophy of 'We're not even going to look at this until 20 other places are actively using it and are being successful with it.'

"But in Mesa, we've taken the opposite approach. We like to be the first and then share our successes with others."

This appetite for experimentation has turned Mesa into a magnet for ambitious tech professionals, with 166 people in Scott's team.

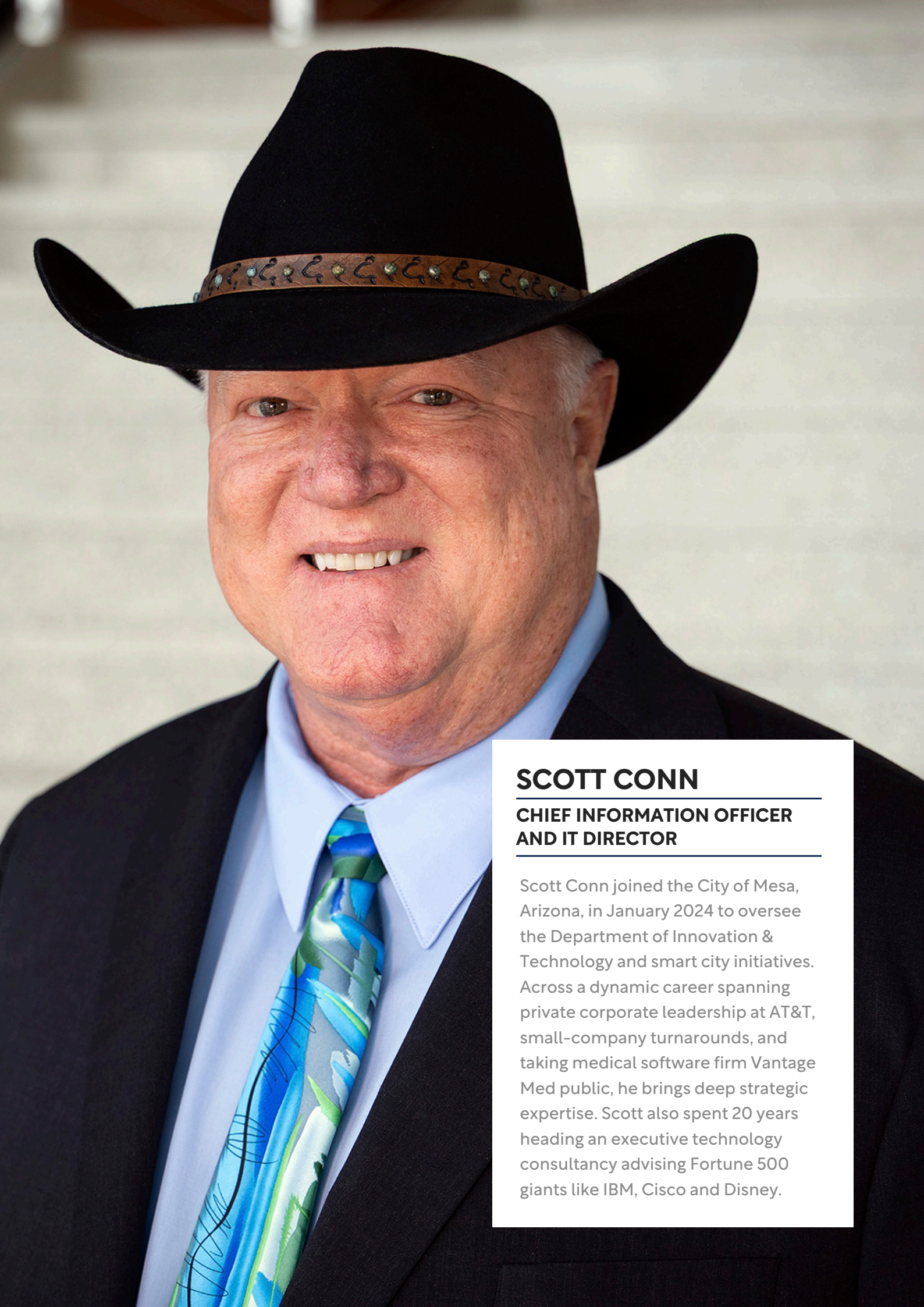
"A lot of people talk about doing the work we do, but not many actually do it," Scott continues. "But our department motto is doing what others only dream. And that's why we recruit the top talent from across the country to come here and work in this city.

"A lot of places don't have their own application development team. Well, we do here. And we have our Program Management Office, where the majority of projects in the city run on underlying technology."

> "THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE IS ALWAYS GOING TO BE THE HUMAN LAYER, AND THAT REQUIRES PEOPLE TO BE EDUCATED ABOUT THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ATTACKS OUT THERE"
>
> **Scott Conn**
> CIO
> **City of Mesa**

The City also has its own help-desk team with a 98% customer satisfaction rating, as well as its own desktop, infrastructure, fibre installation, radio and universal communications teams.

"We don't have a specific AI department," Scott adds. "But we let each team leverage AI opportunities wherever they see it's going to make a difference – like AI for automated call routing, AI for scheduling contractors and the AI chatbot on our website."



SCOTT CONN

CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER AND IT DIRECTOR

Scott Conn joined the City of Mesa, Arizona, in January 2024 to oversee the Department of Innovation & Technology and smart city initiatives. Across a dynamic career spanning private corporate leadership at AT&T, small-company turnarounds, and taking medical software firm Vantage Med public, he brings deep strategic expertise. Scott also spent 20 years heading an executive technology consultancy advising Fortune 500 giants like IBM, Cisco and Disney.



PAUL POLEDNA

ASSISTANT CIO

Paul Poledna oversees applications, infrastructure and communications alongside the CIO. He manages a portfolio of more than 800 applications and critical tech for police and fire services, including the 911 public radio system. Paul also drives key utility automation through Automated Metering Infrastructure for direct billing and leak detection, while managing enterprise partnerships.



> “ WE ARE USING THIS TECHNOLOGY TO BE MORE PROACTIVE, PREVENT SURPRISES AND ENCOURAGE CITIZENS TO SAVE ENERGY”
>
> **Paul Poledna**
> Assistant CIO
> **City of Mesa**

The city launched its intelligent virtual assistant on its website to streamline citizen communication and provide 24/7 support.

“The Mesan chatbot is how the majority of residents deal with the city,” Scott says.

“Its implementation has been a success and we’ve had very positive feedback from the residents being able to find out information quickly.

“It brings the exact information you need and if it can’t, it will connect you to a live person here in the city to help.”

The Mesan chatbot experience earned the city a Smart 20 Award from the Smart Cities Connect Conference & Expo for the most innovative and influential global smart cities projects.

Case Study

Ensuring Round-the-Clock Support for City of Mesa

Charlie Haynie, National Account Manager at Mitel, discusses the unified communications platform that powers one of Arizona's fastest growing cities.

From managing housing departments to transforming customer service, running a city is far from straightforward. Keeping pace with constant change, Mitel powers the City of Mesa with a stable, flexible communications infrastructure that is built to keep public services seamlessly connected, 24/7.

For most account managers, overseeing a large enterprise deployment is a matter of metrics, support tickets and contract renewals. But for Charlie Haynie, National Account Manager at Mitel, managing the unified communications infrastructure for the city is deeply personal.

The place where he grew up is now the very city he supports on a professional basis.

"This account is a little piece of home for me," admits Charlie. "We are talking about a real-life city organisation that serves real people. Its success is personal."

A municipality level of scale

The City of Mesa operates a highly-complex environment comprising more than 15 distinct departments and roughly 4,000 stations.

Unlike standard corporate landscapes where workflows are relatively uniform, a municipality requires a massive, distributed ecosystem. This setup must simultaneously cater to desk-bound administrative staff and a highly-mobile frontline workforce managing everything from public works to parks and recreation. For more than a decade, Mitel's OpenScape platform has served as the communication backbone of this city-wide network.

The core objective is straightforward yet critical: ensuring the right person can always be reached, regardless of their location or device. Whether a resident is calling about a water outage, a road hazard or a building permit, the communication must be flawless.

As Charlie puts it: "Cities can't have bad days." When unexpected events or regional emergencies strike, the pressure on public infrastructure intensifies to maintain smooth operations.



A seamless upgrade

Mitel recently completed a major platform upgrade across Mesa's departments. In an environment that operates 24/7, the ultimate measure of success for such an investment is total invisibility to the end user.

Charlie asks: "After an upgrade, did the end user notice anything? We hope they didn't. And if they didn't have to think about it, that means it's working."

The upgrade was executed without a single operational disruption, subsequently delivering a noticeable reduction in IT support tickets and a smooth adoption rate among staff.

A significant factor in this success is the unique, direct relationship between Mitel and the city's internal IT team. Rather than navigating a convoluted channel partner network, the city works directly with Charlie and his crew. This collaborative, one-on-one approach provides centralised visibility and policy control while granting individual departments the flexibility to customise their daily operations.

Leveraging AI

Looking ahead, Mitel is positioning Mesa to capitalise on emerging technological shifts without starting from scratch.

As AI dominates conversations in almost every sector, Mesa believes that its stable foundation allows for the strategic layering of next-generation capabilities.

"Everybody's talking about AI these days," concludes Charlie. "What's unique is the Mitel platform gives Mesa that foundation to layer AI-assisted capabilities onto it."

Instead of a costly, disruptive platform overhaul, the city can seamlessly integrate intelligent call routing and automated workflows onto its existing system. This approach promises to reduce administrative burdens on staff and significantly improve citizen services.

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Pioneering regional collaboration

Proof of Mesa's forward-thinking approach isn't found only in its solo achievements but also in its commitment to driving regional progress.

The city founded a new organisation that encompasses seven state IT departments in government agencies called WRITA, which stands for the Western Regional Innovation Technology Alliance. It includes Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Idaho, Wyoming and Montana.

"Members can collaborate with one another to ask questions like, 'Hey, has anybody moved an ERP system up into the cloud and do you have a sample RFP we could use?'," Scott explains.

WRITA also provides a space to share experiences, including the consultants used for specific city projects, as well as the challenges cities encountered and the learning opportunities that came from them.

"It's not a CIOs-only club," Scott adds. "This is for anybody in those IT organisations wanting to talk with their counterparts somewhere else for guidance. It places value on collaboration with government IT agencies, and so far, so good."

Fortifying a city against digital threats

In an era of increasingly sophisticated digital threats, Mesa recognises that technology alone cannot protect a municipality. The real frontline of defence begins with the users themselves.

"All the statistics will tell you that 92% of breaches that occur in the

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RUCKUS and the City of Mesa: A Decade of Smart City Connectivity

The network equipment company deployed 1,500 access points across the City of Mesa for public internet access, as well as AI cloud management systems

Reliable internet access has shifted from a luxury to a necessity.

“Connectivity is like a utility today – people just expect it to work,” says Bart Giordano, Senior Vice President and General Manager of RUCKUS. “We all take it for granted and don’t even think about it until it doesn’t work.”

Delivering high-performance connectivity across sprawling, dynamic environments remains a complex technical challenge. “You have periods where there’s a tremendous amount of congestion, which results in interference for network environments,” Bart explains.

“To keep cities running, RUCKUS provides more than just public Wi-Fi, it also supports the critical infrastructure running underneath. The reliability of our platform and our ability to adapt to a dynamic and changing environment is where we really shine.”

Learn More

Bridging the digital divide in Mesa, Arizona

A prime example of RUCKUS’s impact is its decade-long partnership with the City of Mesa, Arizona. With over 1,500 deployed wireless access points, Mesa has built a robust Wi-Fi ecosystem that narrows the digital divide and hosts smart city operations.

“There is a dramatic socioeconomic benefit to providing rich, reliable, robust and seamless connectivity to citizens,” Bart says.

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, when remote work and online learning became mandatory, many citizens lacked broadband at home. Municipalities like Mesa stepped up, leveraging community Wi-Fi programs to keep residents connected to work, school and essential public services.”

The same network that delivers public internet access also supports the city’s long-term smart city strategy, creating a scalable foundation for connected services and future innovation.



Blending into infrastructure

Deploying municipal Wi-Fi requires overcoming complex logistics, like securing permissions, power and data backhaul, while keeping hardware and cabling discreet to preserve city aesthetics. RUCKUS addresses these challenges by integrating directly into existing city assets. These are done through discreet design through access points with internal antennas enclosed in customisable enclosures that blend seamlessly into urban surroundings and tap into pre-existing power sources and connectivity pathways.

“Cities need to ask what assets they own to mount network hardware,” Bart says. “Utility poles belong to utility companies, but cities own streetlights, which conveniently provide pre-existing power and managed connectivity.”

RUCKUS provides flexible solutions to power access points depending on AC/DC power, voltage levels and flexibility in terms of connectivity. This integrated approach enables cities to launch robust public networks without cluttering public spaces with intrusive hardware.

The network as a smart city engine

Smart cities are increasingly leveraging AI to analyse real-time data from city infrastructure, creating a need for more efficient edge processing and network performance. RUCKUS enables this shift through RUCKUS One, an AI-driven cloud management platform. By automatically detecting anomalies, triaging issues and initiating remote remediation, RUCKUS AI reduces the operational burden on IT teams, ensuring city systems stay online without requiring constant physical maintenance.

“With cloud management, engineers don’t need to be on the street to fix problems,” Bart says. “Rather than spending money rolling out trucks to troubleshoot issues in the field, we can now manage networks remotely and automatically resolve problems using RUCKUS One.”

Through flexible hardware integration and AI-driven network operations, RUCKUS provides cities like Mesa with a scalable digital foundation, connecting communities and powering smart infrastructure for the future.

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> "A SMART CITY IS NOT ONLY INNOVATIVE BUT ONE THAT IMPLEMENTS AND DOES THE THINGS THAT OTHERS ONLY DREAM"
>
> **Scott Conn**
> CIO
> **City of Mesa**

cyberattack world are caused by a human clicking on the wrong thing," Scott says.

"So, the first line of defence is always going to be the human layer and that requires people to be educated about the different types of attacks out there.

"We are very big on city staff education and we monitor the training modules that are taken. Typically, we will put out eight training modules per year and KnowBe4 is our vendor for that."

Thanks to this rigorous training, Mesa's phishing failure rates have plummeted compared to national averages.

"We're down in the single digits these days, between 2% and 6%, whereas most cities are in the 15% to 20% range," Scott says. "It's not perfect, but it's better than most."





Paul Poledna
Assistant CIO
City of Mesa

Scott Conn
CIO
City of Mesa

HANSEN TECHNOLOGIES' CONNECTED, SECURE CIS BUILT FOR MID-SIZED UTILITIES

Utilities are under growing pressure to modernise customer systems while maintaining security, affordability and operational continuity. Hansen Technologies, a global provider of software for energy, water and communications utilities, is positioning its customer information system (CIS) as a fit-for-purpose solution for mid-sized providers.

At the core of this approach is a security-first architecture. Hansen CIS aligns with the NIST Cybersecurity Framework, a widely used set of standards for managing cyber risk, and operates on Amazon Web Services (AWS), a global cloud computing platform. The platform's AI Virtual Agent is designed with strict data boundaries. Customer data remains within the utility's own environment, avoiding exposure to external or shared AI models. This focus reflects wider sector concerns around data governance and operational resilience, particularly as utilities adopt more digital tools and automation.

Dominique Blanchard, Utility Billing Systems Administrator at Hansen Technologies, highlights how evolving customer expectations are shaping system requirements.

"Customers expect fast, self-service options without contacting support," Dominique says.

Utilities must now balance these expectations with financial responsibility, particularly in municipal environments where public funds are involved.

"As a municipal utility, we are also mindful of our responsibility to be good stewards of public funds. Our modernisation strategy has focused on balancing customer expectations with affordability by identifying enhancements that improve the customer experience while maximising the value of our existing technology investments."

A configurable system built for internal ownership

A defining feature of Hansen CIS is its accessible and well-documented data model. This allows internal IT teams to query, customise and extend the system without relying on the vendor. The absence of black-box architecture means utilities retain visibility and control over their systems, reducing delays and dependency.



"Hansen CIS balances functionality, flexibility and affordability," Dominique explains.

The platform supports highly configurable rate structures, workflows and role-based access controls, enabling utilities to adapt the system to their specific operational needs.

Hansen CIS supports diverse billing scenarios within a single platform, improving operational coherence. "It supports over 213,000 accounts with strong operational visibility," Dominique notes.

Open integration enables gradual modernisation

Hansen CIS is also designed to integrate seamlessly with existing systems. Its open application programming interface (API) allows different software systems to communicate and share data. With more than 100 pre-built integrations, the platform connects to advanced metering infrastructure (AMI), payment systems and outage management tools, enabling utilities to modernise incrementally. AMI, which enables remote meter reading, has already reduced the need for manual field visits in some deployments. Alongside integration, automation is becoming a key focus. Utilities are increasingly exploring artificial intelligence to manage rising customer contact volumes and workforce challenges. Dominique sees AI as a practical tool rather than a replacement for human staff. "AI helps handle routine requests while freeing staff for complex issues," Dominique explains. Hansen's Virtual Agent can support common customer interactions, such as billing queries or service changes, while maintaining consistency and accuracy.

"Hansen CIS gives us a single source of truth for our customer and billing operations. With AI, we're seeing an opportunity to unlock even greater value from that data, helping us become more proactive, more responsive, and better equipped to meet rising customer expectations."

– Scott Conn, CIO at City of Mesa

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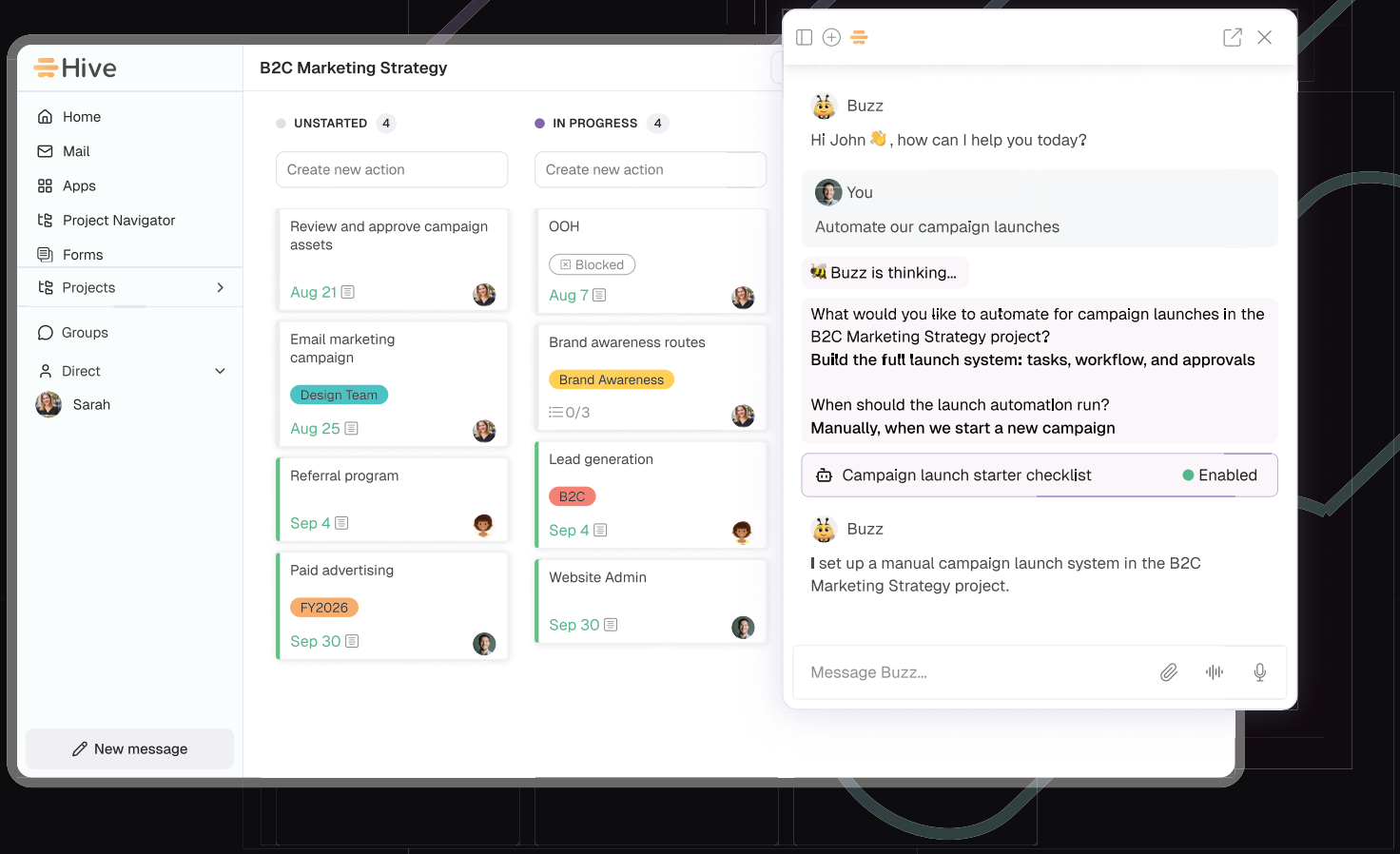
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Strategic vendors driving city transformation

Mesa's ambitious modernisation relies on powerful partnerships with industry -leading vendors who help turn these tech-forward concepts into everyday realities. Hansen Technologies is helping to manage water and energy-related services across the municipality. Hansen is our utility billing system and here at the City of Mesa, we provide electric, gas and water," Paul explains. "With the solution, we provide our residents with automated metres readings." Paul explains.

"It prepares the bills and processes them – either emailing or printing and mailing them to residents.

"Because the system works in real time, we have the ability to detect water leaks and service outages. We don't have to come to a house for a turnoff and we've automated a lot of our processes."

Hansen is the core system the city uses to manage and store all its different pricing rates, such as those for residential versus commercial customers. It holds all of this data so the city knows exactly how much to charge and how to generate bills.

"When a new customer signs up through the utility call centres, customer service enters their information into the system to create an account," Paul adds.

"This automatically triggers a work order for a technician to go out and service or turn on their metre. We use the full range of this system's capabilities.

"Our gas and water metres are read automatically without anyone visiting the house. Once our new portal is fully live, residents will be able to track their usage,



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compare it to their neighbours on a scorecard and request metre reads.

"Additionally, the system's smart alerts – powered by AI – will proactively flag unusual usag, preventing horror stories like an undetected leak resulting in a US$28,000 bill.

"Ultimately, we are using this technology to be more proactive, prevent surprises and encourage citizens to save energy."

The city's core phone system is provided by OpenScape, a Mitel company and long-term partner of Mesa.

"It supports traditional desk phones, Voice over IP (VoIP), and softphones, which allow employees to make and receive calls directly from their computers using a headset," Paul says.

"The system also includes a call-tracking feature that routes desk phone calls to an employee's mobile device, making staff accessible even when they are away from their desks."

Meanwhile, Hive is helping Mesa to manage its various ongoing projects.

"Hive is our enterprise project management software, serving as the central hub for the city's major technology projects and various department initiatives," Paul says.

"Managed by our PMO, Hive generates dashboards and scorecards to give department directors and project leaders real-time status updates.

"While most corporations have only a 50% project success rate, our use of Hive has helped us achieve a more than 90% success rate, meaning our projects are delivered on time, on budget and managed effectively."

Defining what it means to be a smart city

A true smart city is not just defined by the technology it deploys, but also by how effectively those innovations



"WE LIKE TO BE THE FIRST AND THEN SHARE OUR SUCCESSES WITH OTHERS"

Scott Conn
CIO
City of Mesa

directly improve the daily lives, accessibility and financial well-being of its citizens.

"Everybody likes to call themselves a smart city these days," Scott says.

"To us, a smart city is not only innovative but one that implements and does the things that others only dream.

"From a smart city perspective, you have to keep getting smarter every year. They should ask themselves: 'What did we do differently to make ourselves smarter?', 'Are they getting any value from that technology?' and 'Are we doing things faster, less expensively, more efficiently and with greater transparency?'."

98%

THE CITY OF MESA'S HELP-DESK TEAM'S CUSTOMER SATISFACTION RATING



Mesa was ranked number six out of the top 10 digital large cities in the United States in the Center for Digital Government's Digital Cities Survey Awards, two years in a row.

It was in company with San Jose, Los Angeles and San Diego in California, as well as Charlotte in North Carolina, Seattle in Washington, Boston in Massachusetts, and others.

"That [the top 10 recognition] doesn't get given to you unless you are getting better every year," Scott says. "We're constantly on the lookout for new things."

Paul adds: "A smart city puts out technology and solutions to its residents like free Wi-Fi, connected through street lights, or the programme we've launched to teach AI tech to our residents.

"They can access it through the City of Mesa Library system and complete training modules for free."

The City of Mesa rolled out this training to its residents in May 2026. The City of San Jose, California, rolled it out earlier and Mesa decided to follow suit.

"We looked at what they were doing, liked it so much that we decided to flatter them by copying what they did," Scott says. "This is an example of us putting solutions in the hands of our residents and striving to do better to maintain our status as a smart city."

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