Union County School District, Georgia

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OVERVIEW

The Union County School District (UCSD) in northern Georgia needed a cost-effective, multi-site communications solution that would replace an existing Mitel 200SX digital switch, while seamlessly integrating with an existing school intercom and paging system and provide school safety for a 2700 student, 500 employee school district. In addition, UCSD required a solution that would include features such as voicemail-to-email, district-wide four digit dialing, and location-based 911 services. The ability to easily expand the system - performing moves, adds, and changes was also a must.

School District Finds Scalable, Cost-Effective, Multi-Site Solution with Switchvox

CHALLENGE

Challenges involving the integration of existing paging systems at each school needed to be addressed. Teachers and administrators were burdened with dialing through multiple systems to reach one another, and vice-versa. Inbound calls to teachers in classrooms interrupted the entire class over the PA, reducing productivity and learning. In addition, outgoing 911 calls were unable to be identified by location, creating significant problems for responders trying to identify the location of the emergency.

SOLUTION

When evaluating VoIP-based solutions, Bill Driskell, Technology Director for UCSD became very familiar with Asterisk. Driskell appreciated Asterisk's ability to integrate with other systems, something that proprietary VoIP platforms were unable to do. Needing an appliance-based solution, Driskell and UCSD quickly discovered the powerful Switchvox appliance family. Partnering with Richardson Technology Systems, Inc., an independent technology systems integrator specializing in education, UCSD deployed an innovative district-wide Switchvox system with over 230 IP phones, and integration with each school's intercom, paging, and classroom phone system. When compared against a competitor's bid, the Switchvox solution was found to offer more features and potential for integration at a much lower price point. With a Switchvox appliance at each of the five schools and the district office, all of UCSD's communications needs were met, and exceeded.

IMPLEMENTATION

Utilizing an existing fiber optic network that connects each school to the district office, each school's Switchvox integrates with the district office Switchvox appliance, which connects to the public phone network through a PRI. Every classroom's analog telephone connects to a Rauland Telecenter intercom system, which in turn interfaces seamlessly with the school's respective Switchvox system. Teachers can now make effortless calls to other classrooms, secretaries, other administrative staff, and public telephone numbers, something not easily possible with the previous Mitel system. With teachers constantly moving from classroom to classroom, Switchvox's voicemail-to-email feature allows for easy access to important messages.

School safety is utmost concern at UCSD. With the Switchvox solution, the district can now easily identify the location of 911 calls, and administrative personnel can monitor such calls through the interactive Switchvox Switchboard interface. Through the district's innovative integration between the Switchvox and the intercom system, the local police department can listen into each classroom's intercom during an emergency situation. By allowing for more intuitive communication, UCSD's Switchvox system makes students and staff members safer.

Secretaries and administrative staff needed to monitor and direct calls throughout the school district. With the Switchboard application, staff members can effortlessly 'drag-and-drop' calls, and even monitor and direct emergency situations. "The Switchboard's cross-platform functionality is a must," explains Driskell. "Our environment is 90 percent Mac, and the competing Shoretel switchboard application only ran on Windows." Nearly 20 administrative staff use the Switchboard application extensively to route calls through the district. "Our users love the Switchvox Switchboard application," notes Driskell.

RESULTS

"I haven't heard any negative comments about the system; everybody is amazed how seamless and easy it is to use," explains Driskell. Switchvox features, such as call accounting have been extremely valuable to administrators. Union County's previous Mitel platform only offered limited features at a significant cost. With so many included features, the Switchvox platform is a perfect solution for educational environments on tight budgets. "Once schools figure out how easy Switchvox is to deploy and integrate with their intercom, paging, and bell systems, they will be amazed," concludes Driskell.

Digium's vision is a world based upon open communications.

Our mission is to transform the way businesses acquire and operate their communications systems through the application of open source software.

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