



Gettysburg School District gets more UC for less with Switchvox

School System Comes In 10% Below Budget with New Digium Switchvox with Enhanced Security Features



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Schools across the country often find themselves caught in a frustrating web of technological challenges when it comes to their telecommunications. Obsolete technology, outdated infrastructure, limited IT resources, and the common problem of ‘not knowing what you don’t know’ when it comes to assessing phone system needs can present unique challenges when needing to upgrade. That had been the case for the Gettysburg Area School District six years ago, when a failing analog phone system prompted a quick but necessary move to voice-over IP (VoIP). After making it through the transition to a new system, administrators thought the worst was behind them.

However, in less than seven years after the deployment of their upgraded phone system school district leaders found they once again needed to replace that ‘new’ VoIP system.. The experience can best be described as ‘Be Careful What You Buy.’ Just because it’s an expensive, brand name phone system, doesn’t mean the product is the best investment or the right fit for your organization.

As the Gettysburg Area School District began looking for yet another replacement phone system, a new solution was recommended: Digium's Switchvox. The full-featured Unified Communications (UC) solution would prove to be a long-term business solution that was not only affordable, but that provided all the benefits of the big box system with even more enhanced security capability.

The Problem: Lack of Support After Just a Short Few Years

The Gettysburg Area School District, located in Adams County, Pennsylvania, consists of three elementary schools, Gettysburg Area Middle School, and Gettysburg Area High School. They initially purchased a robust Hewlett-Packard 3Com VCX VoIP telecom system to replace a failing legacy system. Six years later, HP placed the 3Com phone system in "maintenance mode," which essentially gave it no viable future and ultimately, no technical support.

According to Kurt Mark, Sr. Territory Manager for Dauphin DataCom in Harrisburg, PA, that experience left many telecom resellers, like his company, holding an empty bag with their customers.

"They kept assuring us they would stand behind the product, but it wasn't long before we realized that wasn't happening and it left us with egg on our faces," Mark admits. "A traditional business telecom system is built to last ten to fifteen years, but most companies will squeeze out fifteen to twenty when they can because a new phone system is a big investment for small businesses and especially for a small school system. The misfortune of replacing their 3Com after only six years was a hardship for Gettysburg Area Schools, so we decided to take a different tactic this time."

Dauphin Datacom is a preferred Digium partner who designs, implements, and supplies a wide range of system technologies and telecom solutions to all types and sizes of businesses and organizations throughout Pennsylvania. Mark's instincts told him that Digium's Switchvox UC solution was the way to go.

Switchvox was the Long-term Answer

Purchasing a Digium Switchvox 450 with a dual hard drive that supports up to 500 users, Switchvox provided the kind of consistency and permanence that would prevent having to worry about replacing the whole system in six, ten, or 20 years. Even after ten years, Switchvox keeps their users on an ongoing path to an upgrade rather than replacement, and its expandability means it will grow with your business.

The Digium Switchvox business communications solution with UC is always being improved and updated by telecom and IT professionals worldwide to keep it flexible, versatile, expanding, compatible, and fully supported.

Gettysburg Area School District purchased a robust Hewlett-Packard 3Com VoIP system. Six years later, HP placed it in "maintenance mode," giving it no future or support. That left many telecom resellers holding an empty bag.

Even after ten years, Switchvox keeps users on an ongoing path to an upgrade, not replace. Its expandability means it will grow with your business.

While “big box” systems with brand names like Hewlett Packard, Avaya, and Nortel may sound stable, the fluidity of telecom technology and the volatility of corporate mergers and acquisitions in the telecom market make Digium Switchvox the better, more enduring choice.

Careful Not to Make Another Mistake

“Because we had recently replaced our old analog system with the 3Com, our VoIP infrastructure was in place,” says Gettysburg Area School District technology coordinator, Jeffrey Williams. “We had a ballpark budget for replacing it and we knew what we wanted in terms of features and functionality needed. But we still took our time researching and accepting bids from other vendors.”

In addition to losing technical support, GASD’s servers were aging out and HP wasn’t going to replace them either, so they took the opportunity to consider some other options.

“We looked at a Shoretel hosted solution that definitely had some benefits,” Williams says. “But we have a small IT staff and in the long run, I decided I liked having it in-house where I could control and manage the implementation with as little complexity, care, and feeding as possible.”

Gettysburg was also not willing to give up anything in terms of features and functionality, and they had some security customizations that required easy streamlining and integration with other software as well.

Some of the customizations included making sure calls go into each and every classroom and that it is tied into the intercom system.

“They also had a unique need for integrated security,” says Mark. “They had a camera at the entrance to the service department that needed to be hooked up and integrated into the phone system so the offices didn’t blindly let people into the building without seeing who it was. That product was manufactured by a third party but the Switchvox integration went flawlessly. Switchvox is excellent when it comes to compatibility with third party or even proprietary software, and it is a capability we promote everywhere.”

There was also enhanced security needed throughout all the schools in the form of a 911 emergency alert system.

Switchvox has an answer for that, too. If any phone on the Digium system within the school district dials 911 from anywhere on school premises, the integrated QuickLert 911 Notification Software immediately sends a pop-up alert to the smart phones, desktops, laptops, tablets, etc. of designated people within or even outside the District, indicating the exact extension of where the distressed call is originating. This allows pro-active measures to be taken within the District, even while first responders are on route to the scene. Law enforcement can then be quickly guided to the possible location of the emergency, especially if the teacher or students are not able to stay on the phone.

The District needed a camera at the service department entrance to be hooked up with the phone system. Switchvox integration with the third-party equipment went flawlessly.

If any phone on the Digium system within the school district dials 911, notification software immediately sends a pop-up alert to designated people.

“[Teachers] can call and receive calls on demand rather than having a receptionist track them down or leave messages. They even have voicemail-to-email integration so they never have to lose a call if they are in a meeting.”

Jeffrey Williams,
Gettysburg Area
School District
Technology Coordinator

Some of the school’s favorite features include mobility and phone apps. “The mobile app is very important for our district teachers and supervisors who often travel from school to school,” says Williams. “They can call and receive calls on demand rather than having a receptionist track them down or leave messages. They even have voicemail-to-email integration so they never have to lose a call if they are in a meeting.”

Because the 3Com system had proprietary phone sets, the GASD purchased 500 new Digium high-definition IP phones including 400 D65 IP basic phones and 100 D70 executive level phones for the school offices and administration. Now all five schools are connected to the main hub in the main administration building.

“We were pretty tight on budget when it came to buying a new telephone solution, but in the end, we came in about 10 percent below that budget, so it all worked out great from our standpoint,” says Williams.



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