

Texas College Prepares for Growth with Unified Communications

Western Technical College improves customer service and scales its infrastructure with Cisco Unified Communications.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WESTERN TECHNICAL COLLEGE

- Education
- El Paso, Texas
- 134 employees

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Enhance customer service across a distributed campus
- Improve employees' ability to collaborate virtually

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Leveraged existing Cisco data network to support Cisco Unified Communications deployment
- Deployed Cisco Unified Communications applications to improve customer interactions and increase employee productivity

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Reduced telephony cabling costs by 50 percent
- Cut operator call-handling load by 50 percent through direct dialing capability
- Enhanced customer service through improved call handling, helping to increase freshman class enrollment by 12 percent
- Increased flexibility and mobility for staff

Business Challenge

Located in El Paso, Texas, home of the U.S. Army's Fort Bliss, Western Technical College provides a broad training curriculum to help students successfully pursue a career in their chosen field—from medical to automotive, computers, and high tech.

Fort Bliss provides a significant pool of prospective students, as military personnel and their spouses require training to transition into civilian careers. But although the college's enrollment surged 12 percent in 2007, the local education market is still extremely competitive. "Students and employers have many choices, so every interaction becomes part of their decision-making process," says Jose Perez, IT director at Western Technical College. "As the volume of inbound calls increases, the calls need to be handled with the same high levels of efficiency and service to which our customers have become accustomed. This system will allow us more latitude in doing so."

Perez and his team identified the college's private branch exchange (PBX) as a key area for improvement, since the aging system proved to be limited and inflexible as the school grew. In January 2007, Western Technical College relocated its main campus to Plaza Circle in east El Paso, 25 miles from its original branch campus in northeast El Paso, more than doubling its square footage. The former PBX did not allow the two campuses to be connected into a single virtual network, thus complicating even the simplest of communications exchanges. "When customers called the main branch campus switchboard, we had to ask them to hang up and direct-dial numbers at the main campus. This presented a significant risk in losing the caller, and customer, forever," Perez says.

In addition to the customer service challenge, Perez also needed a solution that would allow his team to scale Western Technical College's telephony capabilities cost-effectively as the school grew. "The main campus more than doubled our square footage—but a proportional increase in telephony cabling costs was not feasible."

Network Solution

Perez found the solution to both business challenges—enhancing customer service and cost-effectively scaling the communications system—in Cisco Unified Communications solutions. “While Western Technical College has been a Cisco customer and has taught the Cisco curriculum as part of our education offering, I considered two other solution providers in addition to Cisco,” he says. “I have been in the IT field for 20 years, and only Cisco met all of my expectations and requirements in terms of delivering an IP-based, Unified Communications system. Only Cisco could deliver a system that was interoperable, standards-based, cost-competitive, and from a trusted technology leader.”

“The education market is extremely competitive. The Cisco Unified Communications solution significantly improved our competitive position by enhancing customer service and internal communications between our two sites.”

—Jose Perez, IT Director, Western Technical College

Leveraging the Cisco network infrastructure installed at the new Plaza Circle campus, Perez was able to quickly deploy Cisco Unified Communications Manager and the Cisco Unity Express voicemail solution to provide nearly turnkey IP-based communications capabilities. The main campus is served by approximately 60 Cisco Unified IP Phones that allow users to transfer extensions between campuses, using a single point of contact to intercept calls for both campuses.

After successfully deploying Cisco Unified Communications Manager at the main campus, Western Technical College then brought IP telephony to the Diana campus, which has approximately 40 Cisco Unified IP Phones. Both locations are integrated into a single Cisco Unified Communications Manager environment.

INX Inc., a Cisco Gold Certified Partner with Master Unified Communication Specialization, has a long-standing relationship with Western Technical College. INX has provided design and implementation services for the school’s voice and data projects, including the unified communications rollout, which began in January 2007 and will continue into 2008. INX will additionally provide Netsurant’s 24 X 7 Sure Voice support to Cisco Unified Communications Manager once it is implemented, helping to ensure the school’s uninterrupted operations.

“Both Cisco and INX made every effort to help ensure a smooth deployment of our unified communications system,” Perez says. “Having engineers from both organizations on-site gave me all the assurance I needed to make sure that the deployment would be smooth and free of major problems. This assurance was crucial, since communications are so important to our business.”

Western Technical College’s Unified Communications system delivers business-critical availability through a highly fault-tolerant solution configuration that helps ensure that staff and students will be able to make and receive calls, even in the event of total network failure.

“In the past, companies feared that if they lost a network connection, they would lose their VoIP communications services,” Perez says. “Now, with the redundancy provided by Cisco Unified Survivable Remote Site Telephony (SRST)—a unique feature embedded within Cisco IOS Software running on Cisco routers—if I lose one of the T1 lines between our campuses, the Cisco

Unified Communications Manager will take over as an independent communications tool. If I lose the branch campus, the calls will be routed through the main campus, and vice versa. In addition, if connectivity is lost on both T1 lines, each campus can independently route calls to the public switched telephone network. I now can be confident that we will never lose a call.”

Business Results

With the Cisco Unified Communications solution up and running smoothly, Perez has noted a number of strong benefits that help Western Technical College achieve its dual goal of providing exemplary customer service while cost-effectively expanding its infrastructure to support business growth.

Most apparent is the reduction in telephony cabling costs. By leveraging existing Cisco data networks to support the IP-based system, Western Technical College has reduced telephony cabling costs by 50 percent. “Cabling materials and labor comprise a major cost driver in building out any new facility such as the main campus. By choosing a Cisco Unified Communications solution, we have achieved cost savings that go straight to the bottom line,” Perez says.

Another readily apparent benefit is the 50 percent reduction in calls into the school’s main switchboard. The Cisco Unified Communications solution enables direct dialing, which is enhanced by two key capabilities that provide mobility to the employees:

- A “Follow Me” capability called Single Number Reach (SNR) that automatically routes a call to the user’s mobile phone if the desk phone is not answered
- A “Single Number Reach” capability provided by Cisco Unified Mobility that enables the user’s mobile phone and desk phone ring simultaneously, with the call available concurrently on both lines.

Of SNR, Perez says, “Now, an employee can switch between a mobile phone and a desk phone in the midst of a call, without interrupting the connection. This is a fantastic capability.”

The newly mobile users also enjoy the benefit of being able to log in to any phone on the network, which allows their personal extension and settings to follow them from phone to phone.

The Cisco Unified Communications solution has also made a significant contribution toward Western Technical College’s ability to enhance the level of customer service that it provides. Fewer calls into the main switchboard allow receptionists to focus their attention on guests, creating a more welcoming experience. Callers who do reach the receptionist are handled more quickly, because they are no longer directed to hang up and call another number in their attempt to reach the intended party.

In addition, since calls can now be transparently received by, and forwarded to, the recipient’s desk phone and mobile phone, callers are much more likely to reach the recipient instead of voicemail.

With the integration of the two campuses now completed, employees have the ability to contact each other through extensions from one campus to another, saving time from connecting through a general reception area. All of these improvements ultimately reduce time and contribute to better time management and customer service.

Perez says, “The education market is extremely competitive. The Cisco Unified Communications solution significantly improved our competitive position by enhancing customer service and internal communications between our two sites.”

PRODUCT LIST

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Catalyst Switches 3560, 3750, 4006, 1900
- Cisco 2500 Series Routers
- Cisco 2600 Series Routers
- Cisco 2800 Series Routers
- Cisco 1700 Series Modular Access Router

Security and VPN

- Cisco PIX Firewalls

Cisco Unified Communications

- Cisco Unified Communications Manager
- Cisco Unified Mobility
- Cisco Unity Express
- Cisco Unified IP Phone 7931G, 7940G, 7960G
- Cisco Unified IP Conference Station 7936
- Cisco Unified Survivable Remote Site Telephony

Wireless

- Cisco Aironet® 1200 Series Access Points

Next Steps

Completing the Cisco Unified Communications deployment of the branch campus will lay the foundation for future communications capabilities at Western Technical College. Perez is also looking to deploy additional Cisco Unified Communications applications, including unified messaging capabilities—thus allowing voicemail messages to be consolidated with e-mail messages in a single inbox—and campus-wide teleconferencing abilities.

“Cisco Unified Communications solutions allow us to grow our system to meet our needs. This is very different than the PBX approach—once you outgrow that kind of system, you need get a new one. Cisco allows me to add on software modules to scale the system and add new capabilities. We are expecting Western Technical College to grow significantly over

the next few years—and we know that our investment in Cisco Unified Communications solution is protected.”



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