

Distance Learning College Puts Community Satisfaction First by Improving Contact Center

Thomas Edison State College implements easy-to-use information center to support needs of students, parents, faculty, and staff.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THOMAS EDISON STATE COLLEGE

- Higher Education
- Online Education; headquartered in Trenton, New Jersey USA
- 18,000 students worldwide

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Replace outdated Private Branch Exchange phone system
- Reduce frequently dropped incoming calls, lower maintenance costs, and improve system functionality
- Field and transfer calls to appropriate school departments

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Unify voice, video, data, and mobile applications on fixed network
- Reduce transaction time using wireless network
- Increase network security, resilience, and scalability

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Provide telephone system capable of handling 100,000 calls a year
- Provide students and staff with the answers they need in a timely manner
- Reduce staff time and resources

Business Challenge

Thomas Edison State College is a nationally recognized distance learning institution focused exclusively on adult learners that is known for its academic excellence and educational integrity. The college is one of New Jersey's 12 senior public institutions of higher education and one of the first schools in the country designed specifically for adults. It provides high-quality, collegiate learning opportunities for self-directed adults, and offers degree programs and certificates in more than 100 areas of study. The majority of Thomas Edison State College's students are in their late thirties and many are military men and women serving our county in all parts of the world. Based on these demographics, the College offers flexible learning methods and is completely focused on remote, distance learning.

Unified communications is a necessity for the college because most communications between the administrators and the 18,000 students, 280 staff members, and four office buildings are done via telephone or email. Thomas Edison State College's

contact center, overseen by the Admissions Office, fields approximately 8000 calls a month and approximately 100,000 calls in a calendar year. "All of our global collateral promotes one toll-free phone number that students and faculty can call for any needs or questions they may have. These calls range from asking for an overview on the college to specifics on an offered class to obtaining tuition receipts," says David Anderson, Assistant Vice Provost for Learner Support, Thomas Edison State College.

The college wanted to provide an easy-to-use student information center for enrollment and college services. However, the original telephone system, an aging Avaya Private Branch Exchange (PBX), was extremely limited in its functionalities and could not expand beyond two office buildings. Calls were frequently dropped, and contact center staff found it increasingly difficult to transfer calls to the appropriate school department. Additionally, the outdated PBX required habitual maintenance that took up staff time and cost college officials money.

The growing inefficiencies with the system led Thomas Edison State College to seek an updated phone system that would not only handle the large number of calls received, but also elevate the system's functionalities and capabilities

Network Solution

The account team from Cisco and Transnet Corporation, a Cisco silver partner located in central New Jersey and serving the New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York region, was able to show school officials an existing unified call center as an example and explained how it would work for Thomas Edison State College. The team was able to illustrate the potential business benefits that the college would receive if the school began viewing the information centers as a unified department, including improved call flow and efficient functionalities.

The process from initial demonstration to implementation took approximately a year and a half. A system incorporating Cisco® Unified Communications, Contact Center, and Contact Manager was installed in late 2007, integrating the college's voice, video, data, and mobile applications on a fixed network to deliver a media-rich collaboration experience across school departments. Transnet's project team worked on the infrastructure upgrade and installation while helping ensure effective management. The applications installed greatly reduce transaction time and the security, resilience, and scalability of the network enable users in any workspace to easily collaborate anytime, anywhere.

Thomas Edison State College's unified contact center is now a distributed, IP-based "customer" service infrastructure that comprises a continuously evolving suite of innovative, multichannel services and customer-relationship-management applications. These services and applications provide premium responsiveness and streamline exchanges. Additionally, the call and inquiry status is recorded and tracked, creating a more organized and efficient system.

Business Results

Most schools and universities do not view student information centers as a unified department. Departments such as finance, enrollment, and transcripts tend to function as different divisions with

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different staff managing inquiries for each one, usually creating a longer wait time during inquiries. "We wanted to be able to reach out to different departments and create a leveling system that gets calls to the right people," says Anderson. "With our updated phone system, we have increased the number of incoming calls we can manage, fewer calls are being dropped, and we are able to get folks critical information faster and in one phone call. In short, we are serving our college community in a much more efficient manner and using our staff resources in a proficient way."

By creating a unified phone system for all departments with greater ease of management, Thomas Edison State College has alleviated staff time, so they can focus on other aspects of the college rather than chasing after dropped calls or tracking down department information. From a budgetary perspective, the new system has also helped in reducing both operating costs and the cost of callbacks to students globally.

The upgraded unified contact center provides Thomas Edison State College's students, mentors and staff with 24-hour support in order to assist with any problems that they may be experiencing at any time. The Cisco phone system will automatically root the call to a partner service if the call is made after hours and no one is physically in the offices.

"The Cisco unified phone system has given Thomas Edison State College a competitive edge as we are able to provide greater services to our college community. We hope to expand our offices in the future to eventually include a department dedicated to resolving any student-service issue, while continuing to focus on our commitment of improving student satisfaction," says Anderson.

Both Cisco and Transnet are recommending additional future applications to continue leveraging Thomas Edison State College's investment in unified communications.

PRODUCT LIST

Routing and Switching

- Cisco Catalyst® 6509 Series Switches
- Cisco Catalyst C3750E Series Switches
- Cisco ASA 5520 Series Adaptive Security Appliances

Voice and IP Communications

- Cisco Unified Communications
- Cisco Unified Contact Center
- Cisco Unified Contact Manager

For More Information

To find out more about the Cisco Unified Contact Center, go to:

<http://www.cisco.com/en/US/products/sw/custcosw/products1844/index.html>



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