

Making Cambridge's 800th birthday a rewarding one



Wheels-within-wheels complexity

The result would be one of the world's largest such Cisco® communications systems in the education sector. A total of some 16,000 new telephones (the vast majority being IP-based devices) had to be installed in more than 300 University buildings and public locations. The task was organised into 199 different work packages - from six handsets to several hundred handsets each.

A major procedural challenge was that most of the colleges, departments, faculties, schools, and other institutions had their own IT teams. The central Computing Services team does not look after all of the LANs: each unit supports its own. They therefore had to be managed as separate IP telephony-enablement projects, which added wheels-within-wheels complexity.

Craig Fenton explains: "BT understood this better than the other contenders and came forward with a much more suitable migration plan and strategy. They were willing to work with us to deploy and support the core system over these multiple networks."

A new Unified Communications System delivered by BT is expected to save the university £1m a year.

One of the world's oldest universities, Cambridge has been a preeminent institution of higher learning since 1209. Today it comprises 31 colleges and over 150 departments, faculties, and schools.

As a leading research centre, Cambridge affiliates have won 85 Nobel Prizes, more than any other single institution in the world.

Fitted in 1985, the University's outdated telephone system had grown to three times larger than its planned size and was showing its age - causing management problems and making maintenance increasingly expensive.

In replacing it, Cambridge wanted greater operational simplicity, higher efficiency, and lower costs. To help determine who should supply the new communications system, Cambridge turned to PTS Consulting Group, with whom it has a long-term relationship.

"Cambridge needed a platform that would reflect its reputation as one of the world's greatest centres of learning and research," says Craig Fenton, the PTS project director.

The installation and service contracts were won by BT, who proposed a Cisco® solution. "What came across strongly with BT was its partnership with Cisco®," Craig continues. "Proven experience with the Cisco® Unified Communications Manager and knowledge of IP [internet protocol] telephony were further clinching factors."

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Jake Hornsby
Head of networks, University of Cambridge



“ As one of the world’s leading universities, Cambridge is keen to continue to attract and retain the very best students and researchers... With the new unified communications system from BT and Cisco®, we’re confident we can accomplish this.

Dr Ian Lewis, Director, Computing Services University of Cambridge

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After the contract was announced a pilot site was deployed for the Computing Services team. Wherever possible, standard configurations were used to simplify the installation and ensure that deployments to each site were kept on schedule. The installation went speedily.

“Building a system of this size was a huge achievement,” says Jake Hornsby, head of networks at the University of Cambridge. “It was rolled out without affecting users. The installation was so well organised that it was completed a full two months earlier than planned. We’re delighted.”

The greatest attraction

With the Cisco® Unified Communications Manager system now installed, the University of Cambridge expects a £1 million annual cost saving in comparison to the old system.

With both data and voice communications running over the same infrastructure, the need for redundant wiring and hardware has been eliminated.

But the value is not simply monetary. The many features of the new communications system help users spend less time chasing people, and more time being productive. For example, BT integrated the new Cisco® system with an existing voicemail application to ensure that no one ever misses an important call. With Caller ID, people can screen incoming callers, while phone calls can be initiated from a PC at the click of a mouse. Cambridge users quickly seized on the flexibility advantages of their new communications system.

According to Craig Fenton: “The Department of Social Anthropology recently went through a building refurbishment. They simply unplugged the phones and moved them around the building themselves, saving a fortune.”

System administrators also enjoy new benefits:

- Easier management through a web-based interface
- The ability to quickly scale up total system capacity
- Flexible management: simple handset moves, adds, and changes
- Greater accountability through accurate equipment and usage information for more precise expense management and billing

“As one of the world’s leading universities, Cambridge is keen to continue to attract and retain the very best students and researchers,” concludes Dr Ian Lewis, director of computing Services at Cambridge. “Part of that involves providing thoroughly modern facilities that reflect our forward-looking relationship with technology. With the new Cisco® communications system from BT, we’re confident we can accomplish this.”

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