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Case Study: Saint Stephen's College

HOW SAINT STEPHEN'S COLLEGE CUT THEIR PHONE BILL IN HALF

BY IMPLEMENTING A UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

Case Study Interview with Peter West, Director of Learning, David Craft (IT Manager) and Tim Harris (Network Administrator) at Saint Stephen's College

Saint Stephen's College is a P-12 co-educational independent school on the Northern Gold Coast established in 1995.
It is a leading academic school and has a high use of technology – specifically innovative technology that connects students, teachers and all associated staff.

▶ The business need

Saint Stephen's College was using a five (5) year old ageing Samsung PABX system which was constantly being pushed to its limits, could not be expanded upon, and often gave very poor call quality.

The school's Network Administrator, Tim Harris, had been researching phone systems and unified communications platforms - and had already decided on one before attending an event run by Insync Technology and Microsoft. The event was also attended by David Craft, IT Manager and Peter West. Tim then initiated a review as a result of the event.

He said "We were aware of Lync before, but had not realised it had reached the maturity level that it had – it had moved on a lot in 5 years when we first looked at it".

Furthermore, Saint Stephen's College found that it offered a better feature set than the competitor for a cheaper price and was easy to integrate with their Microsoft workloads such as SharePoint and Office 365.

After comparing feature sets and costs, the decision was made and the College decided to implement a Microsoft Unified Communications platform – to be designed, installed and supported by Insync Technology.

▶ The challenge

The biggest challenge the team found was the training and education of end users, typically curriculum and administration staff. It was a big change particularly for the reception staff as they take a high volume of calls. It was a big learning curve to transfer calls via their computers by dragging and dropping rather than pressing buttons on a phone.

But Peter West explained how important it was to have the staff using the system properly, "We built training courses in our Learning Management System (LMS) so our staff could learn how to use it, and then we built demonstration tests to fine tune skills. Their use of the system is so central to our operations, we have to know staff are up to speed".

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> "If you have an ageing phone system with poor call quality that needs replacement, talk to the team at Insync and get Lync – particularly if you're a Microsoft school".

Key outcomes

One of the biggest outcomes at the school according to Peter is that "you don't call a phone, you call a person". Now everything is transparent - as Lync integrates with everything, all staff can see each other's availability at any given moment. Furthermore, Peter mentioned there is no double dipping with two systems and there is only ONE database to keep up to date, which "for overheads and management, is just wonderful".

The results

As well as the voice quality being a real revelation (as Peter stated "It's so clear it's literally like they are standing right next to you!"); there has been a huge saving in costs to run the system. As calls are made via their Internet provider, Tim states, "the savings have been significant; over 70% reduction in call costs per month at this stage. The system will pay for itself."

In addition to this, the feedback received from staff has been very positive – they particularly like the instant messaging and being able to share screens with each other when making calls. It was a real revelation being able to implement an all-encompassing system with less money than was set aside for the phone upgrade!

The future

This project is part of a greater plan for the school – allowing a seamless collaboration environment for students and staff. In the future Lync will be introduced to the students as part of Office 365; enabling students to contact their teachers and curriculum staff via the native federation abilities of Lync. This allows students and teachers to form study groups, share content, and collaborate in real time regardless of location.

Infrastructure is being put in place so that if, for example, there was a flu epidemic, Saint Stephen's College could still run in a virtual environment even if no one was physically at the school. Peter states "Our school could still function because of Lync – we'd have a big advantage, we'd be able to run the school virtually via one big integrated Microsoft system that works and is super easy to manage".

Top tips for schools in a similar situation

Peter recommends to any school which is in the same situation, "if you have an ageing phone system with poor call quality that needs replacement, talk to the team at Insync and get Lync – particularly if you're a Microsoft school".

Peter also recommends finding a supplier that is knowledgeable and trustworthy that will satisfy today's requirements as well as those in the future. This was important to the team at the College and the team found that Insync Technology "understood our business needs and didn't just try to sell us a cool product. They would never do this – if they didn't have a solution they would tell us that and would only offer a solution that actually fitted in with our business needs. More importantly, we trust them; Nathan and his team are brilliant to work with and come highly recommended".

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