


How Insync expedited Australian Catholic Universities' modern workplace transformation amidst the rise of COVID-19

- The desire for a 'modern workspace environment' that provided seamless collaboration, enhanced communication, and increased efficiency lay behind ACU's decision to overhaul their systems.
- The new digital workspace provides complete online functionality, the ability to join meetings, access workspaces, collaborate and communicate with colleagues and peers, and interact with external stakeholders.
- The digital workspace program has made working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic much easier than it would have been under the old system.





Australian Catholic University (ACU) ranks in the top 10 of global Catholic universities and is in the top two percent of the world's tertiary institutions.

With 35,000 students, and around 9,000 staff and academics, it currently has eight campuses throughout Australia, with a ninth in Rome. ACU's 2020-23 Strategic Plan aims for excellence in research, teaching, learning and service. ACU believes that empowering staff and students via technology is a way to achieve those goals.

With digital transformation a focal point of its Strategic Plan, ACU had engaged Insync Technology to do some transformation ground work, as well as fellow Microsoft partner, Espire Infolabs.

Wanted: a seamless and secure modern workplace for everyone

The desire for a 'modern workspace environment' that provided seamless collaboration, enhanced communication, and increased efficiency lay behind ACU's decision to overhaul their systems.

"Amongst the pillars of our strategic plan is our intent to deliver an engaging, technology-enriched and immersive student experience," says Dr Stephen Weller, COO and Deputy Vice-Chancellor of ACU.

It was vital to ACU that the new digital workspace provided a seamless and secure environment for ACU's staff and students regardless of their location.

ACU opted for Microsoft solutions because of the 'breadth and space for opportunity' the products provide. Insync's role was initially to provide key governance and compliance guidance to ensure a smooth transformation.

“ There's nothing like a crisis to present an unprecedented opportunity for change and transformation

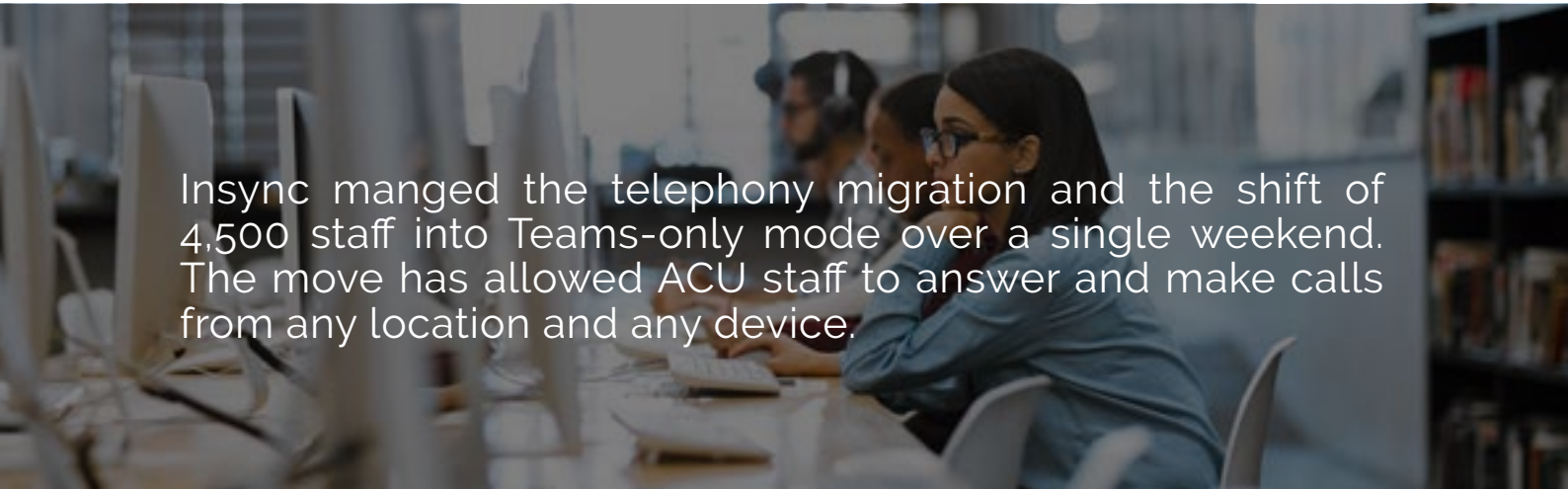
Niranjan Prabhu, CIO and Director of IT,
Australian Catholic University

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How a two-week refresh changed ACU's teaching spaces

As with any sensible plan, the transformation was scheduled to be staggered over a long time frame to allow for stronger adoption and user support. This plan included migrating ACU's telephony into Microsoft Teams.

But even the best laid plans could not have foreseen the impact of COVID-19. Instead of a slow and steady approach, overhauling of ACU's systems took just two weeks, with the university's on-premises SharePoint & shared network drives, Skype for Business, and Cisco desk phones all being replaced with a complete Microsoft 365 solution including SharePoint Online, OneDrive for Business and Calling for Microsoft Teams.



Insync managed the telephony migration and the shift of 4,500 staff into Teams-only mode over a single weekend. The move has allowed ACU staff to answer and make calls from any location and any device.

Teams is now being piloted across various course units to enhance communication and collaboration between students and staff.

The new digital workspace provides complete online functionality, the ability to join meetings, access workspaces, collaborate and communicate with colleagues and peers, as well as interact with external stakeholders.

The attraction of being able to share documents and live chat during a meeting – in addition to running 3x3 video calls and features like the 'raise hand' – is proving popular, not to mention necessary in light of a second lockdown.

The university's meeting rooms were also upgraded, with room panels indicating availability and facilitating on-demand meetings – something that's compatible with non-Microsoft devices.



Benefits for COVID-19 and into the future

The obvious benefit of the modern workplace transformation is the capability to work efficiently from home.

A surprising outcome of the migration and overall transformation has been the lack of issues and service tickets raised. There has been no resistance to the shift in technology and only one per cent of staff have raised service tickets.

Dr Weller believes that the digital uptake is likely to prove enduring.

"The COVID-19 experience has proven clearly that people want to have more choice," he says. "For example, in the future students on placement might want to be able to use a tablet to access their notes on OneDrive or Teams where and when they want, without being tethered to a campus."

ACU is also introducing virtual laboratories, whereby students can remotely access cloud-based digital laboratory resources using Azure Lab Services via Microsoft Teams.

"Students will be able to have the same experience at home as they can on campus, which is really important not only for existing students, but for where we see education headed in the future," says Niranjan Prabhu.

““ The digital transformation now underway will play a critical role in terms of fulfilling our strategic goals for the university. We are empowering students and staff with modern tools and data-rich insights – setting them up for success.

Dr Stephen Weller, COO and Deputy Vice-Chancellor,
Australian Catholic University

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Plans for the future

ACU now plans to develop its own applications and workflows through Microsoft Power Platform. For example, they plan Data Lake using Power BI and the Azure Data Platform for identifying students needing help. This includes students at risk of quitting their studies. There are also plans for a chatbot to provide students with online support.

“ The balance that will need to be struck in a post-COVID world, as ACU regroups to face whatever will be the next normal, is between investing in technologies that will improve the staff and student experience and building capabilities within current financial constraints. ”

Niranjan Prabhu, CIO and Director of IT,
Australian Catholic University



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