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FURTHER EDUCATION SUCCESS STORY

Coleg Glan Hafren

Coleg Glan Hafren is Cardiff’s largest further education college and offers courses for school leavers, adults, international students and businesses. Its 600 staff deliver 800 courses to 13,000 students from its main Trowbridge Road Campus to a total of four sites distributed around the city.

Its ageing Siemens Realitis system with 240 handsets provided telephony services to three locations whilst the Design Academy at a fourth location had its own independent system and was not a part of the campus network.

Frustrating Times

This created a number of problems beyond system obsolescence, calls could not be easily routed to the correct person and this was complicated by the fact that up to 18 members of the teaching staff could be sharing a single telephone extension number. As teaching staff were unavailable to take telephone calls during the working day, it was inevitable that occasionally voicemails were not received by the intended recipient.

Another headache was the cost of implementing moves, adds and changes (MACs).

“Our voice system was provided as a completely managed service via NTL and Siemens, so the IT department didn’t have much to do with it,” recalls Gareth Burton, IT manager, Coleg Glan Hafren. “Anytime we needed to setup, cancel or reset voicemail, or move somebody around, our managed service provider would charge for sending an engineer – even for a quick job.”

The inflexibility of its voice system was exacerbated as the College continued to expand, so the decision was taken to deploy an IP based Unified Communications system.

CHALLENGE:

- With four College sites and 600 staff served by an ageing and inflexible managed voice system, communications were becoming strained at Coleg Glan Hafren. As the College continued to expand, conducting moves, adds and changes was costly; routing calls to the right extension was difficult; and voicemails were lost.

SOLUTION:

- The College deploys ShoreTel’s ShoreGear voice switches and ShorePhone IP telephones to consolidate its four sites under a single, reliable and centrally managed voice network.

BENEFITS:

- Significant cost savings and efficiency gains realised by eliminating multiple PBXs and consolidating separate sites under one centrally managed IP Unified Communications system.

- Integrated voice applications improve call handling 100%; hunt group and automatic forwarding to mobile numbers ensures staff can be contacted when needed.
- Integration with Microsoft Outlook allows voicemail notifications to be delivered direct to a user’s inbox and accessed by remote workers.
- ShoreTel directory has been integrated with the College’s desktop Web application to allow users to search the ShoreWare Personal Call Manager database and enable dial direct from their PCs.
- Integration with College car park access control system to enable remote operation of barriers and intercom.



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Defining the Requirements

Burton and his team investigated drew up a specification for a distributed and scalable Unified Communications system that could serve a large user base of mobile workers and which offered integration with Microsoft Outlook® for voicemail notification.

Further key requirements included:

- Fully customisable auto attendant with facility to record bi-lingual prompts
- Hunt group style overflow for incoming calls to main receptions and departmental numbers
- Call centre and soft phone facilities
- Call logging and reporting

Making The Right Choice

The college created a shortlist which identified six manufacturers; Alcatel, Avaya, Cisco, Mitel, ShoreTel and Siemens. It was quickly apparent that ShoreTel offered the best technical solution, with features built-in, that in other systems, were expensive options.

“Although not the lowest quote initially,” says Burton, “ShoreTel was the only price that remained consistent once we had mapped out the full system requirements.”

In parallel the college evaluated the partners who would be providing the system on behalf of the various manufacturers. Solar Communications were identified as clear winners, they were recognised as Unified Communications specialists with a proven track record and over 1,000 satisfied business customers. As a ShoreTel ‘Gold Partner’ and winner of the ShoreTel ‘Outstanding Customer Service’ and ‘European Partner of the Year’ awards on multiple occasions they had the knowledge and capability to support the multi-site Coleg Glan Hafren network implementation.

Solar Communications worked closely with the college to create a system design and implementation plan. The new solution comprised a ShoreGear® E1, three ShoreGear 120, and six ShoreGear 40 voice switches. These voice switches plug into the LAN via Ethernet, support both IP and analogue phones, and are deployed in an ‘N+1’ architecture, so that if a switch fails or is isolated by a network fault, the phones automatically failover to another voice switch at the site. The College also opted for a combination of 110, 230 and 560 ShorePhone® IP telephones (the 560s providing operator backup functionality). These phones are configured automatically when added to the network. Ultimately the system was deployed within a week and a half, and configured for 600 users and 250 ShorePhone IP telephones. This has since been expanded to include the Design Academy, and a further 40 IP handsets.

Ease of Management

This new distributed architecture has enabled the College to replace its multiple PBXs with a single centrally managed system. “Using ShoreTel’s browser-based ShoreWare® Director, the system is extremely easy to manage – probably the easiest of all the products we looked at,” Burton confirms. “We can add new users and locations, configure voicemail and, essentially, do all the things that were done previously by an external engineer.”

Built-In Functionality

The ShoreTel system’s integrated features such as voicemail, automated attendant and automatic call distribution (ACD) have enabled the College to realise substantial cost savings and productivity gains. “With the ShoreTel system, our call handling has improved 100%. Auto attendant deals with the majority of incoming traffic, allowing callers to select an extension, dial by name, or by department,” continues Burton.

Facilities such as hunt groups and automatic forwarding to mobile numbers ensure that staff can be contacted when needed – allowing the college to utilise its reception staff more efficiently.

“...a mini call centre workgroup was setup, enabling us to handle some 30,000 calls over a month and a half. Previously, we had to employ temps or pull our staff away from other duties.”

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Flexibility

“During our student enrollment period a mini call centre workgroup was setup, enabling us to handle some 30,000 calls over a month and a half. Previously, we had to employ temps or pull our staff away from other duties.” states Burton

With the ShoreTel IP Unified Communications system, any staff member can login to a phone using their personal extension to make a call or access voicemail. With the ShoreWare Personal Call Manager integrated with Microsoft Outlook, voicemail notifications are delivered direct to the user's inbox. Furthermore, the college has incorporated the ShoreTel system directory into its desktop Web application, enabling users to search for contacts and dial direct from their PCs.

Proactive Response

On the odd occasion where there has been an issue, Burton says the response times have been fantastic. “When a potential fault is detected, system warning messages are automatically routed to Solar Communications to be actioned, often before anyone at the College notices.”

Unified Communications Supports New Working Practices

There have also been some unexpected benefits. The College uses a swipe-card access control system for its car parks and, by plugging the internal modems directly into its IP network, found that it can operate the car park barriers remotely by dialling them, as well as running the intercom over the network. “This is just one example of the kinds of things you discover with an IP Unified Communications system.” states Burton.

ABOUT SOLAR COMMUNICATIONS LTD

Established in 1988, Solar Communications is an award winning trusted communications partner for SME and enterprise businesses throughout the UK and Europe. With offices in Chippenham and London, Solar Communications has been “ShoreTel European Partner of the Year” for the past four years and is first and only European Partner to join the “ShoreTel Circle of Excellence.”

Solar's knowledge and experience allows bespoke solutions tailored to business requirements that enable customers to improve productivity, reduce costs and increase profitability. Solar has a reputation for excellent customer support consistently scoring over 97% Customer satisfaction through independent analysis. For more information, visit solar.co.uk

ShoreTel European Partner of the Year 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011

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