ShoreTel

DOUGHERTY COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM CUTS $150,000 IN ANNUAL PHONE COSTS WITH SHORETEL PHONE SYSTEMS

Like most K-12 school districts nationwide, Dougherty County School System in Albany, Georgia has struggled with state and federal budget cuts. Though the district has added students and teachers, it has been forced to do so with the same or reduced budgetary funds each year.

Despite the budget crunch, Dougherty is committed to keeping school facilities modern and outfitted with the technologies its 18,000 students and 1,900 faculty and staff need. In fact, the district was the first in Georgia to implement a Cisco Networking Academy, a course to prepare students for a career in networking. And it leads the nation as one of the first districts to achieve ISO 9001 certification, an international standard that ensures consistent service in all of Dougherty's business process departments.

As part of its focus on outstanding business practices, in 2002 the district looked to its phone system to improve communications and cut costs. At the time, the district had a relatively new PBX system in place. However, the Centrex system relied on traditional phone lines that cost the district about $20 per line. With more than 600 lines, and long distance and 411 directory costs, the district spent $12,000-15,000 every month on its phone bill.
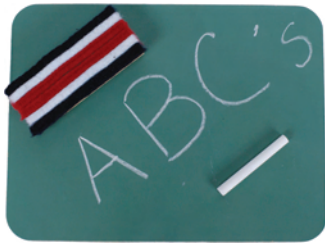
VOIP KEY TO COST SAVINGS, ENHANCED COMMUNICATIONS

Dougherty saw IP telephony as the key to breaking free from these steep line costs. Stormwood, an Atlanta-based ShoreTel channel partner proposed the ShoreTel solution to Dougherty County Schools. "Beyond potential cost savings – estimated at upwards of $12,000 a month – the many features of ShoreTel technology would significantly benefit district communications," said Nate Griffin, president and CEO of Stormwood, Inc.

"When we saw the ShoreTel system, there was really no reason to look anywhere else," said Bill Freeman, Technical Services supervisor for Dougherty County School System and a 25-year employee with the district. "It was the ease of adding new users, having call history records, being able to make journal notes about calls, the voice mail feature, integration with Microsoft Outlook, and the control points. A big feature was being able to block 411 calls. And we could reduce our Centrex costs by eliminating a lot of our lines."

With the ShoreTel system, the district would cut costs by operating with 500 fewer lines by leveraging its existing analog phones, blocking 411 directory calls and 800 calls, and closely controlling long distance calling.

The district funded the system through a combination of sources. Ninety percent was covered by E-Rate, a government funding program to help schools afford telecommunications and Internet access. A local option sales tax to support schools in Dougherty County funded the remaining 10 percent, meaning Dougherty brought in ShoreTel technology at virtually no cost to the district.

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With Stormwood's help, Dougherty implemented the system in all 39 of its locations over the course of a few months. The ShoreTel infrastructure includes the ShoreGear 60/12, 120/24 and T1 voice switches, with six primary rate interfaces connected to the T1 switches. With an embedded, real-time operating system, each switch ensures dial tone with exceptional reliability. Additionally, the district has two voice mail servers, with one acting as a backup.

VOICE MAIL FREES OFFICE STAFF, CONNECTS PARENTS DIRECTLY WITH TEACHERS

The district provided phones to more than 600 administrative personnel, and rolled out voice mail – a feature new to the district – to 1,700 district staff and faculty. Before, office staff had to handwrite messages for teachers. Now they simply transfer calls or calls go straight to the appropriate phones or voice mail boxes. Teachers can check their messages from any phone, and receive direct, detailed messages from parents.

Users with computers have access to a variety of features that enhance productivity and communication. Dougherty takes advantage of ShoreTel's integrated messaging with Microsoft Outlook. Unified messaging lets users receive voice mails in their email inboxes, direct dial to Outlook contacts and schedule calls on their calendars. Users can play voice mail messages aloud, and even email them to others.

Additionally, staff can log notes about calls in their computers, as well as access a complete call history. This leaves no question about when, or if, a conversation took place. For administrative personnel that make dozens of calls a day, the personal call history serves as an important record of their activities. With Call Manager, each phone user can access a directory in the ShoreTel system to locate district numbers quickly.

Other ShoreTel features give Dougherty valuable control over its system. ShoreTel work group capabilities let staff decide how to automatically route calls, such as to multiple phones at once or in sequence.

## TECH STAFF CONFIGURES USERS – FROM ANY BROWSER

Freeman has found particular value in the administrative capabilities of the ShoreTel system. Typically, the start of each school year has brought about 1,000 phone-related work orders, which in the past required Freeman or another member of his team to troubleshoot onsite at schools. Each visit could take up to an hour.

Now, the team handles more than 90 percent of all calls from the ShoreTel interface. In about five minutes, they complete a move, add or change for a user. Such time savings not only allow the staff to handle other issues, but also minimize delays for users.

"Personnel are constantly moving, especially at the beginning of each year," Freeman said. "If I need to make a change to a user, or reset a password, I can log in from any computer, anywhere, and make the necessary changes. We reroute their extension number to their location and they carry the same number with them."

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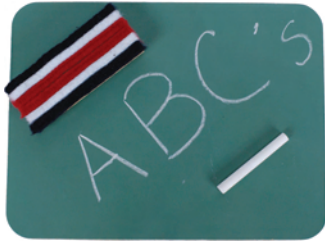
From any browser, Freeman can also access phone usage records, such as how often, how long and at what times staff use the phones. Technical Services can also control long-distance usage by only enabling it on a specific phone at a designated time.

LOOKING TOWARD A PHONE IN EVERY CLASSROOM

Next, Dougherty plans to install a phone in every classroom, which will further connect staff, faculty and parents and offer added security. The district will minimize costs by using analog phones with its ShoreTel system.

Throughout its implementation and as it faces these next steps, Dougherty can count on Stormwood to ensure the ShoreTel system fits its ongoing needs. Stormwood's knowledge and willingness to do whatever it takes – including working nights – to roll out the system brought about a smooth implementation, according to Freeman.

"Dougherty County as a whole is like a big family. We stress, 'it's not your coworker, but your family.' The Stormwood guys are just like family to us too. They are just a phone call away."

RESULTS: SAVINGS TOPPING $150,000 A YEAR AND BETTER BUSINESS PROCESSES

By cutting most of its phone line costs and additional expenses like 411, Dougherty County keeps at least $150,000 a year – a dramatic cost savings that adds padding to the district's strained budget and can be allocated to other initiatives.

ShoreTel advanced features allow staff, faculty and parents to connect more quickly and directly, while relieving office staff. Likewise, Technical Services personnel save nearly an hour for every phone-related work order, amounting to about 800 hours of time savings at the busy start of each school year.

Overall, the improved communication supports the district's ISO certification and drive toward better business processes.

"ShoreTel backs up our ISO efforts by making us more efficient and effective," said Robert Lloyd, executive director of Business and Finance at Dougherty. "With the ability to log calls and see a history of calls, we do what we say, and can say what we do."

Freeman agrees. In his 25 years with the district, he counts the ShoreTel implementation as one of the most successful. "With the cost savings and all the features we got, ShoreTel has been by far the best technical addition I've seen," he said.

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