ShoreTel

SMALL OKLAHOMA SCHOOL DISTRICT INCREASES STAFF PRODUCTIVITY WITH COST-EFFECTIVE, EASY-TO-MANAGE SHORETEL PHONE SYSTEMS

Objective:

The district wanted to upgrade its archaic phone system while keeping costs down and management simple, and not getting too automated for the small community.

Solution:

With the ShoreTel IP telephony system, HPS uses its existing data network and analog phones to lower costs, realizes exceptional ease of management, and added a number of features that boost efficiency and communication.

Results:

Hennessey Public Schools implemented an innovative, flexible and feature-rich phone system while preserving its personal touch. The district saved thousands by tapping into its existing data network, using analog phones, and eliminating the need for costly line installation. The seamlessly integrated, concurrently running converged network eases management, while advanced features free staff time and improve overall district communication.

"Compared to other systems, the management of the ShoreTel system is so much easier. It's pretty maintenance free. I can manage it regardless of where I am on campus. Being Web-based, if someone has a problem, I can reset a switch from any computer. I don't have to physically walk across the street to do that."

– Austin Williams
Technology Coordinator

Located about an hour northwest of Oklahoma City, Hennessey, Oklahoma is home to about 2,500 residents. Approximately 800 of those residents attend Hennessey Public Schools (HPS), which is comprised of an elementary, middle and high school situated in several buildings on one campus.

In 2000, the small district decided it was time to upgrade its phone system, a PBX key system that had been in place for more than 20 years. With just a basic system, the district could not transfer calls, provide voice mail to staff and teachers, or easily add extensions. When calls came in, administrative staff would give callers a number to call back to reach their desired party. And for messages for teachers, office staff passed handwritten messages to students, who delivered them physically to each teacher's mailbox.

The district knew a more feature-rich phone system would significantly streamline staff activity and improve communication. However, it had three main concerns: cost, ease of management for the district's one-person technology staff, and not getting too automated for the Hennessey community.

"It's a small community, so we don't want to get too automated or too high tech," explained Austin Williams, technology coordinator. "People don't like to dial in and not talk to a live person, so the administrative staff wanted to stay away from that."

A COST-EFFECTIVE SOLUTION IN SHORETEL

Williams had seen the ShoreTel IP telephony system – one of the first IP telephony systems available – in use at another school and was impressed with its capabilities. With a fiber backbone already in place, HPS saw ShoreTel as a cost-effective, flexible solution. As a distributed system, ShoreTel would allow the district to use its existing data network and inexpensive analog phones to roll out lines to users throughout the district, and thereby avoid thousands of dollars of phone company line installation costs. Plus, HPS could use e-rate funding to cover part of the solution.

Additionally, the system offered ease of management, timesaving features, and the flexibility to handle calls in a number of ways. In keeping with the district's personal touch, HPS staff could answer calls during business hours but easily transfer them to the right extensions.

HPS' Safe Schools Committee liked that ShoreTel offers backup lines readily available in the event of power failures – an occurrence not uncommon with volatile Oklahoma storms – and direct-dial 911 access.

FLEXIBLE CALL ROUTING OPTIONS SAVE STAFF TIME

Williams easily implemented and configured the system on his own, with support from ShoreTel representatives available via converged conferencing. The district has ShoreGear 60/12 and 120/24 voice switches, which run an embedded, real-time operating system, each ensuring dial tone with 99.999 percent reliability.

In a matter of minutes, Williams integrated the ShoreTel system with Hennessey's existing data network, resulting in seamless, concurrently running voice and data communications. Further simplifying his job, Williams manages the converged network from one, Web-based interface.

HPS extended phone system use to all administrative staff, as well as to a number of teachers, coaches and others who handle extracurricular activities. Each user has either an actual phone, or voice mail that can be checked from any phone. Special education teachers can easily call parents from their classrooms, or students can reach their parents from the football locker room or yearbook office.

Also, HPS now has three options for handling incoming calls. Live staff members across all three schools and the administrative offices can answer and easily transfer calls to the right extension or voice mail. Or, callers can dial the intended extension directly. After hours, HPS can activate an auto attendant that answers, gives callers access to a phone directory and routes them to the right extensions.

When calls come in, administrative assistants know if someone is on the phone, and can then direct calls to that individual's voice mail.

"Now, even during class, we can send a call to someone's voice mail, so we aren't physically taking a message and trying to get it to them," explained Diane Riddle, administrative assistant. "That saves us a lot of time."

As a frequent phone user, Riddle also appreciates ShoreTel features like caller ID, a quick-lookup directory of numbers, call history information and conference calling for talking to district vendors.

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Administrative Assistant

SIMPLE MANAGEMENT RELIEVES IT COORDINATOR

The sole technology coordinator, Williams handles the phone system, network administration, and support for servers and 400 work stations. With the ShoreTel system, he can easily move, add and change system configurations from a Web interface.

"Compared to other systems, the management of the ShoreTel system is so much easier," he added. "It's pretty maintenance free. I can manage it regardless of where I am on campus. Being Web-based, if someone has a problem, I can reset a switch from any computer. I don't have to physically walk across the street to do that."

The system also brings valuable flexibility. Schools can share lines, giving them access to additional lines when needed. When bad weather requires that the district send students home early, the district can shift extra lines to the elementary school to inform parents.

"Every time we want to do something, it's flexible enough that we've been able to do it," Williams said.

Plus, outside callers no longer get busy signals because lines are tied up. Calls roll automatically to the right extension or voice mail.

RESULTS: FULL-FEATURED, EASY TO MANAGE SYSTEM BOOSTS PRODUCTIVITY, COMMUNICATION

An early adopter of IP telephony among school districts, Hennessey Public Schools implemented an innovative phone system while preserving its personal touch. The district keeps expenses down by utilizing e-rate funding, tapping into its existing data network and using analog phones. With a distributed IP telephony system, the district saved thousands over what it would have cost to install lines for a traditional system.

Additionally, the system's ease of management enables the district's technology coordinator to handle all maintenance and expansion easily on his own. Administrative staff members save countless hours not having to handwrite and deliver messages to teachers and staff, allowing them to focus on other aspects of their jobs.

Most importantly, the system's flexibility, and features like voice mail, directory look-up and auto attendant, allow HPS to be more efficient and still preserve its personal touch.

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