

ShoreTel and Perkiomen Valley School District



Perkiomen Valley School District puts ShoreTel top of its class



CHALLENGE

- As Perkiomen Valley School District expanded its facilities, reliability and cost issues with its previous hosted voice over IP solution led IT staff to consider alternative in-house options.

SOLUTION

- The Perkiomen Valley School District chose the ShoreTel Unified Communications (UC) system, deploying ShoreGear Voice Switches at its seven schools and administration building, voicemail servers, a conference phone and more than 650 ShorePhone IP Telephones district wide.

BENEFITS

- Estimated savings of approximately 75 percent over the previous hosted system, enabling the district to reallocate budget toward additional educational resources.
- Unprecedented built-in reliability, which ensures all calls get through, even in the case of a switch or line failure.
- Easy system access and management from anywhere on the network, which frees up time for the IT group to focus on other, mission-critical projects, without requiring additional headcount.
- Rapid scalability on a platform that continues to lead the industry for advanced features and functionality.



ShoreTel Pure IP Unified Communications solutions deliver huge savings, plus reliability and efficiency improvements to help school district invest in new technology for learning

Students in the Perkiomen Valley School District in Pennsylvania are experiencing the future of collaborative learning, and enjoying a high tech twist to the age-old pen-pal exchange at the same time. Thanks to the district's recent ShoreTel Pure IP Unified Communications (UC) system deployment.

Not only does the ShoreTel UC system deployment enable district educators, staff and parents to enjoy state-of-the art communications functionality, but with cost savings of more than 75 percent over the previous system, the district has been able to put more technology in the hands of students by replacing outdated computers and purchasing new educational technologies, such as interactive white boards and data projectors.

"I am confident that not only are our students well-positioned for the future, but that the ShoreTel UC system will meet the district's changing communications needs for years to come," said Mike Balik, the district's IT Manager.

Before the ShoreTel deployment, however, Mr Balik faced rising costs and hours of frustration. After engaging in a hosted Cisco voice-over-IP (VoIP) system, the district, which serves about 5,800 students, found itself at a crossroads as it wrestled with unreliable communications and a massive building expansion project.

"We often found ourselves in system outages that we had no control over." Mr Balik explained. "The concept of the hosted VoIP system sounded impressive, but since we had no control over the system at our District, we were left with frustration and no where to turn when we experienced reliability problems."

ShoreTel gets top marks for simplicity, reliability and value

By the time the service contract came to an end, the district, which has four elementary schools, two middle schools and a high school, was in the process of renovating the high school and adding a new science and technology building. The high school building had been using a standalone legacy PBX-based system, which was not expandable, so rather than extending the unreliable hosted solution to the new building, the District took the opportunity to investigate other options.



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After issuing a Request For Information (RFI), and evaluating several systems, Mr Balik and his team eliminated the option of using another hosted solution from the short list, which by then comprised systems from ShoreTel and Alcatel. The next step was to attend live demonstrations of both systems, talk to customer references and visit customer sites to see the solutions working in real-time.

“After seeing the Alcatel system working, we realized it was not the right fit for us,” Mr Balik said. “It seemed that there was a great deal of system management involved. By contrast, the ShoreTel UC System was tightly integrated, very easy to manage, and the ShorePhone™ IP Telephones were far superior in quality to any other phone we considered.”

Once the district was ready to make the final purchase, Liquid Networks, a trusted systems integrator and ShoreTel partner, supplied five ShoreGear® 120 voice switches, a dozen ShoreGear 60 switches, two ShoreGear 40 switches, and two ShoreGear T1 voice switches, as well as two voicemail servers (one serves as a backup). In addition, more than 650 ShorePhone IP Telephones were deployed across the district’s eight locations, and a ShorePhone IP 8000 conference phone enables large group teleconferences.

Smooth transition adds up to successful implementation

To help ensure the transition between systems went smoothly, and to enable the school district to adequately budget the capital hardware expenditure, the ShoreTel UC system was deployed in phases. ShoreTel and Liquid Networks staff worked closely with the Perkiomen Valley IT group during installation in the first two buildings, but Mr Balik and his team quickly deployed the system to the rest of the buildings without assistance.

“The ShoreTel UC system was very easy to learn,” Mr Balik said. “After receiving help with the high school and administration buildings, we could complete the remaining sites by ourselves with only a few occasional questions through e-mail.”

As a result of choosing ShoreTel, the Perkiomen district no longer needs to use additional outside lines to reach other

buildings. All District employees are on the same phone and voicemail system, using four-digit dialing to reach co-workers and dialing each other by name. Calls can be transferred the same way.

The ShoreTel UC system comes with the ShoreWare® Personal Call Manager application which easily integrates with Microsoft Outlook® to provide staff with integrated messaging, such as contact screen pop and calendar alignment. With ShoreWare Personal Call Manager, employees can quickly type in a name, bring up a number, and calls from local online directories—all with the click of a mouse from the desktop.

Another new improvement is the voicemail notification feature that sends a copy of the voicemail to staff and teachers’ e-mail inboxes, while a blinking indicator on the phone helps ensure calls are prioritized and returned in a timely manner, and without interrupting teaching time.

Cost savings of 75 percent put more technology in students’ hands

For Mr Balik and his small IT team, all this functionality comes at a tremendous cost savings over the previous hosted solution: “The cost factor alone was huge—before we were paying more and receiving less for our investment,” Mr Balik said. “Now, with long distance service and ShoreTel maintenance, we have reduced our costs by almost 75 percent. This kind of savings seemed like a fantasy only a few years ago.”

The savings derived from the ShoreTel UC system are one of the biggest benefits to the Perkiomen Valley school district at a time when districts are being asked to do more with less. Mr Balik added: “ShoreTel has allowed us to do more educationally because we don’t have to spend so much on our communications system. Now we can put more technology into the hands of our students – and that is the largest benefit.”

Another huge benefit for this modern district that prides itself in ensuring ongoing communications with parents and the community is the reliability of the ShoreTel UC system. ShoreTel call control software is distributed to every voice switch, which



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eliminates any single point of failure. ShoreGear Voice Switches are designed for reliability with no moving parts, except for a fan, and the same real-time operating system that is used in heart assist devices. In the highly unlikely event that a switch fails, such as a power outage to the building, the other switches on the network automatically take on the call-processing load.

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System manageability as easy as ABC

Since the district did not add headcount to the IT staff to accommodate a new communications system, ease of use was essential to ensure workload balance among existing staff, and a key factor in the purchasing decision. The Perkiomen Valley IT group uses ShoreWare Director, a Web browser-based management interface that provides easy system access and management from anywhere on the network.

With ShoreWare Director, Mr Balik can manage all aspects of the system, including voicemail, automated attendants and adds, moves and changes, quickly and easily. When a new user is added, in a few clicks the system automatically updates the centralized database and every voice switch. At the same time, a mailbox is automatically created, the automated attendant dial-by-name and number feature is updated, and online directories are revised. Changes are made just as quickly.

“Converging voice and data on one network with the ShoreTel UC system has helped reduce infrastructure costs and simplified management,” Mr Balik explained. “And it will be easy to scale if we add another building to the network, or decide to add features in the future. Users have an interface they like and are comfortable with, and I feel confident our team could handle the expansion of another site on our own.”