CASE STUDY

Amarillo ISD Along With Austin-Based Affiniti Increases Time On Task While Lowering Costs With A ShoreTel Phone System

Amarillo ISD is located in the Texas Panhandle. The district covers 70 square miles and serves 30,000 students with 4,000 employees across 50 locations. In 2004 the district began looking into options to upgrade their phone system, with the ultimate goal being a phone for every teacher. The existing AISD key phone system led to higher costs and staff inefficiencies. The challenges were many and the IT staff wanted to eliminate having to physically making moves, adds and changes across the large district. The local phone company could not provide enough copper wiring to expand the existing system to every teacher and less than 100 staff members had voice mail. The bottom line was if the district wanted to reach their goal of each teacher having a phone or voice mail using their current system would be cost prohibitive.

Easy to Manage And More Features With ShoreTel

In an effort to free itself from its current copper wire system and add flexibility AISD turned to digital voice communications. The district evaluated many different providers, including 3Com, Avaya, Cisco and Nortel; AISD selected the ShoreTel VoIP system. By selecting the ShoreTel VoIP system the district added many valuable features to achieve better communication and enhance staff efficiency at a lower cost than the limited existing system.

In addition some of the other providers would demand significant staff resources for their day-to-day management while the ShoreTel system proved to be simple to manage.

"As a school district, we don't have a dedicated phone staff," explained Jeff Roller, AISD Chief Technology Officer. "The ShoreTel system was very intuitive, easy to set up and easy to manage. A person can use the Web interface to make moves, adds and changes right from their desk. It's amazing how easy it is compared to other systems."

The ShoreTel system allowed the district to save cost by being able to use existing analog phones and purchase services on a per-line basis as needed instead of doing everything at one time. As a vendor provided managed system the digital voice communication systems is eligible for federal e-rate funding which in turn covered three fourths of the cost of the solution.

Affiniti, an Austin-based ShoreTel channel partner, worked with Amarillo ISD to deploy the VoIP system throughout the district. To route calls to different departments Affiniti used the ShoreTel work group features to configure the call flow routing. To simplify dialing for staff and outside callers Affiniti acquired a common prefix for all district numbers. "Affiniti worked with our IT guys to provide turnkey implementation," Roller said. "They really stepped up to the plate and have been willing to help us in any way. We have the flexibility to manage as much as we want or we make a call to Affiniti and can count on them to get it done immediately."

To accommodate contracts already in place with their local phone carrier AISD decide on a phased implementation. There are currently over 3600 faculty and administrative personal using the ShoreTel system at AISD, including all of the teachers and staff at the four high schools. Every user can now take advantage of a number of ShoreTel features and all have access to voice mail.

Office Staff Experiences Relief With Voice Mail and Call Routing

Teachers and staff can access their voice mail messages from any phone or receive the messages in their email inboxes by using the ShoreTel Unified Communicator. Personal are also able to use the Find Me feature in the ShoreTel system to roll calls over to a cell phone if they wish. This adds the flexibility to receive calls and obtain messages at any time and cuts down on the need for hand written messages.

The ShoreTel system has a built-in directory which allows outside callers to locate teacher and staff members and gives the caller the direct number for future reference. Call transferring is streamlined through this feature by typing in a few characters to find the right extension and route the call. With numerous calls being made every day by over 3600 user's theses features allow the teachers and staff to be more productive.

Additional ShoreTel Features Enhance Time On Task And Staff Productive

Additional features provided by the ShoreTel system enables the district to create work groups which allows each department to designate their own call flow. A call can be answered by a live person or be set up to be routed from one person to another until the call is answered, or have the calls go to one extension. The auto-attendant feature allows for flexibility during peak activity times or off-hours call to be answered and directed to the appropriate extension. The auto-attendant can be programmed so holidays and business hours are automatically activated relieving AISD staff from having to turn on the auto-attendant when they leave. The feature rich ShoreTel system allows departments such as the Food Services to more effectively manage their daily calls from cafeteria managers at each of the more than 50 AISD school cafeterias.

"The enhanced features add to productivity and allow more time on task," Roller said. "People are dedicated to their own work instead of just answering the phone."

The district also takes advantage of the ShoreTel converged conferencing to connect various district administrators and staff. Teleconferences can be set up which eliminates staff from taking extra time from their day to drive across the city. "As dynamic and flexible the system is, we can customize it for each individual situation," Jeff said. "That's the beauty of it. It's been able to meet every situation we've come up to."

Results: Better Communication With Rich In Features For A Lower Cost

AISD was able to up-grade their phone system with a digital communications system that is easy to manage and rich in features which has allowed it's teachers and staff to be more focused on their job, rather than on answering the phone. Besides saving the district more than $20,000 a year over its old system, Amarillo ISD is more effective at allowing teachers and parents to communicate and improve student performance.