AMS.NET HELPS SCHOOL DISTRICT LEVERAGE EXISTING BACKBONE FOR IP DEPLOYMENT

The San Lorenzo Unified School District oversees 16 schools and a district office, with a teaching and administrative staff of more than 1,100 personnel serving students in this community located east of San Francisco.

The district had a traditional private branch exchange (PBX) phone system and aging voice-mail system that were increasingly expensive to maintain, and didn't offer the features that the district really needed for its staff. The district chose Cisco® Silver Certified Partner AMS.NET to help them take full advantage of their existing Cisco network infrastructure to deploy an IP telephony solution that would provide all the features and functionality that the staff needed, while saving enough money so that the system would virtually pay for itself.

SCHOOL DISTRICT READY FOR CHANGE; CHOOSES EXPERIENCED SYSTEMS INTEGRATOR

"We figured we'd have to spend close to US$200,000 to bring the system to the level we wanted," says Art Cipriano, director of IT for San Lorenzo Unified School District. "We didn't want to spend that kind of money on a traditional system—I wanted to move forward. AMS.NET came up with attractive ways to finance new equipment and handle support that made a new system work financially. And the ROI made it an even easier decision." The district had to staff a full time contractor just to support the old PBX system and keep up with the many moves, adds, and changes required by the busy staff. A new network backbone from Cisco Systems® was put in place one year earlier,

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vertical Market/Technology
IP Telephony/Education

Partner
AMS.NET is an IP convergence specialist and Cisco Silver Certified Partner head-quartered in the Bay Area east of San Francisco. The company has created effective, reliable computer network solutions throughout California for more than 12 years, and has built a strong vertical market in the public sector, serving government and educational institutions.

Customer
The San Lorenzo Unified School District oversees 16 schools and a district office building, with a teaching and administrative staff of more than 1,100 personnel serving students in this community located east of San Francisco. The school district wanted to take full advantage of its existing Cisco network infrastructure to deploy an IP telephony solution that would provide all the features and functionality the staff needed, while saving money.

Challenge
AMS.NET had to move 1,100 phones from PBX to IP telephony overnight. The team put in a lot of effort, planning, and testing to make sure that things went well, and problems were kept to a minimum. AMS.NET has learned that the more pre-planning it does, the smoother the day of installation goes.

Return on Investment
School district projections show that the converged network with IP telephony would save the district nearly $400,000 per year. With school districts counting every penny these days, that's money that can go right back into the classrooms.

and provided the infrastructure for IP telephony. Cipriano knew that this new technology would not only provide all the features the district needed and wanted, but would also save the district money in the long run. The district was spending approximately $120,000 per year, in addition to outside contractor costs, just to keep the old system up and running. His projections showed that a converged network with IP telephony would save the district nearly $400,000 per year.

Cipriano had previous experience with AMS.NET and knew that the company could be successful at the project, but he also had had two other companies bid on the project: the existing support contractor and the systems integrator that put in the original Cisco backbone a few years earlier.

"AMS.NET had a very competitive bid, but it also had very strong references which was the most important thing to me," says Cipriano. "Also, we had an existing Cisco backbone so the fact that they were a Cisco Certified partner was critical."

PRIOR MARKET EXPERIENCE ENSURES SUCCESS

AMS.NET is an IP convergence specialist headquartered in the Bay Area east of San Francisco. The company has created effective, reliable computer network solutions throughout California for more than 15 years, and has built a strong vertical market in the public sector, serving government and educational institutions.

Previous IP installations in similar settings gave AMS.NET the experience to know what to look for and what problems might arise while deploying an IP Telephony solution for the San Lorenzo schools. The company used existing customers as a model for the design implementation, feature set, and support requirements that the San Lorenzo Unified School District would need.

"What's most important in the education sector is to look closely at customer needs—it's part of our culture," says Robert Tocci, CEO of AMS.NET. "We make 100 percent sure that the products and services that we suggest will benefit the customer's operation, that the solution will work as described, and that we will deliver on our promises."

Cipriano echoed that sentiment. "Robert and the AMS.NET team really understood how we were laid out and how a school district operates," he says. "It was a major leveraging piece of the solution."

AMS.NET's success in the public sector is encouraging its growing business in the public sector, and the company has already completed many successful IP deployments at companies throughout California.

"We were at the forefront of IP telephony," says Tocci. "Our first deployment took place in August, 2000 at a Bay Area school, so we jumped in early and we're very comfortable with the technology and with our abilities."

AMS.NET DEPLOYS TOTAL SOLUTION

With an existing backbone already in place and available to support IP telephony, AMS.NET set about replacing the school district's existing PBX system. AMS.NET proposed installing three Cisco Call Manager systems in the district office and the two larger high school sites. They also brought in a Cisco Unity™ unified messaging solution, gateways, routers and a mix of three different kinds of Cisco IP Phones to be used in the common areas, classrooms, and by administration. The solution encompassed all 17 district locations and included 1,100 phones.

"We recommended a Cisco solution because we feel it's the best IP telephony solution available," says Jim Barron, vice president of sales for AMS.NET. "The school district already had a Cisco-powered network in place, so it was logical to use one vendor for voice and data and it was a perfect model for centralized call processing."

The biggest deployment challenge for AMS.NET was phasing 1,100 phones from PBX to IP overnight. The team put in a lot of effort, planning, and testing to make sure things went well with minimal problems. AMS.NET has learned that the more pre-planning it does, the smoother the day of installation goes.

"We also learned to make sure that the call flow for all locations is determined before the initial rollout," notes Tocci. "Every user may have a different idea of how they want their phone to interact, so we modified our template to have more information on call flow."

For his part, Cipriano admitted he was "dreading" the day all the phones were moved from the old PBX system to the new IP telephony technology. He expected some potentially huge communications problems, but happily reports that the changeover was very smooth with no interruption in service.

The next step was getting everyone trained on the phones, which cannot be overstated. "We're learning more and more that training should be mandated," Barron says. "Most of our support calls are not really problems, but users who are unfamiliar with the system." Now everyone in the school district is getting their voice messages and taking advantage of all of the new features of the IP system, such as accessing and managing their voice and e-mail messages from a single inbox. The district saved money immediately as it no longer needed the expensive PBX contractor for repairs and maintenance, and with the phone

system as part of the data infrastructure, there's just one system to manage. Keeping up with staff moves, adds, and changes is fast, inexpensive, and as easy as carrying the phone to the new office or classroom and plugging it in.

"With today's tight budgets, the technology we advise and implement for schools must have features, functionality, and a return on investment," says Tocci. "It must increase efficiency while lowering costs and then that money can go right back to the students, which is everyone's goal." Tocci thinks the best part of the new system is that it prepares the school district for the future. "They'll be able to use XML applications, and deploy IP video surveillance and conferencing," he says. When they're ready to incorporate those kinds of pieces, they can easily put it on the same backbone.

Cipriano likes that AMS.NET recommended, designed, and deployed a total solution that addresses all of the district's needs. "AMS.NET enabled us to see that we could accomplish this," he says. "Their proposal was very convincing-—that we could make quantum leaps in voice technology while leveraging data technology, and that we could afford it."

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