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NEC

UNIVERGE 3C™

Medicine Hat School District

Customer

- Medicine Hat School District #76 (Canada)

Industry

- Education K-12

Challenges

- Phone system service costs were increasing
- Poor system stability and reliability
- Lengthy repair cycle time
- Limited contact with equipment and software manufacturers

Solution

- UNIVERGE 3C™

Results

- Fully virtualized system supported locally, with responsive help from NEC
- System reliability and stability significantly improved, with added flexibility and features
- Substantial reduction in costs and repair time while reducing complaints and repair requests

Medicine Hat School District #76 is an urban school district located within the city limits of Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada serving more than 7,000 students. The district is comprised of 16 schools and five outreach schools supported by three administration and maintenance/facilities buildings.

Twenty of the district's buildings are connected to the Alberta Supernet, an ultra-high speed fiber optic network that connects more than 4,700 government facilities, including government offices, hospitals, schools, libraries, municipal offices and provincial courts around the Province of Alberta. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) also connect to the Supernet and use the infrastructure to extend high-speed Internet services into rural communities. The other four buildings in the district are connected via a TELUS DSL connection. TELUS provides wireless and internet services across Canada, along with TV and residential phone services in western Canada.

Challenges

The school district's previous phone system created several challenges for the IT department responsible for maintaining it. According to Richard Potter, director of technology for the Medicine Hat School District, service costs were steadily increasing and stability and reliability were common issues. Additionally, locally installed FAX lines shared line access with the phone system, which caused school staff confusion whenever 911 was dialed. Repair requests and complaints about the phone system were escalating, with time to repair averaging one week. The added cycle time for repairs was also worsened by delays in obtaining service or replacement equipment since the manufacturers were not local and not in direct contact with the district. Having direct contact with equipment and software manufacturers was a top requirement.

The school district sought to work with a provider that thoroughly understood its need for a robust communications and collaboration solution that would provide reliable service at a lower cost. "In the IT world, we're all about standardization," said Potter. However, the configuration of the previous systems was not standardized, which led to poor system stability and increased vendor support costs. Ultimately, it boiled down to needing a communications system that would connect all district facilities and seamlessly integrate with the Alberta Supernet.

Solution

The team from NEC and the local NEC-affiliated dealer spent significant time on site with the customer at its various locations to gain an accurate understanding of the requirements. The NEC solution needed to be cost effective and find the right balance between the customer's technology needs and the benefits to the district. Working closely with the director of technology, the NEC team was able to identify opportunities where NEC technology could be used to provide an end-to-end solution.

NEC leveraged its knowledge of the unique needs of the district and system integration experience to develop solutions that met the objectives and goals of the customer. By evaluating the customer's technology, personnel training and daily operations, NEC developed a migration plan to move district facilities to NEC's UNIVERGE 3C™ system. The migration plan included connecting to the existing phone system, then converting one building at a time.

UNIVERGE 3C is a complete, software-based, unified communications (UC) and collaboration solution that redefines the way a business and individuals communicate. This comprehensive solution delivers a fully functional IP-PBX along with a complete set of voice features and sophisticated UC and collaboration applications that can be tailored to your specific business needs. It operates across premise, cloud or hybrid environments and provides the necessary agility for today's dynamic work environment. Through its standards-based components and distributed software architecture, UNIVERGE 3C delivers unmatched flexibility, reliability and scalability to keep an organization competitive in today's marketplace.

"It was really important to us that we work with a company that could not only provide great service, but could also train our technicians to troubleshoot and repair any issues we may experience," said Potter. *"I'm a firm believer in technicians getting hands-on experience. Our technicians did the install while NEC worked with them every step of the way. Post install, we have had to make very few calls back to NEC and our technicians benefitted from gaining experience and knowledge from NEC."*

Technicians at the Medicine Hat School District now support the entire, fully virtualized system, with responsive help from NEC when required. The system is flexible and not dependent on specific hardware requirements. Previously a safety concern, the calls to 911 no longer share space with FAX lines, and now utilizes a Private Switch/Automatic Location Identification Service (PS/ALI), which provides the correct address for each building to the 911 dispatch center. Along with solving the district's stability and reliability concerns, staff now has access to many new features such as voicemail and being hosted on an IVR (Integrated Voice Response) server, voicemail to email and a virtual phone book accessible by every employee. With the new system, the district is experiencing substantially fewer complaints, with reduced repair time and lower service costs.

"The NEC system has proven very reliable, with Level 1 support able to quickly handle most of the calls to our help desk. The average cycle time from trouble report to resolution has gone from one week to just under 90 minutes. From the initial install to full implementation, the support we have received from NEC has been great," said Potter. *"A reliable communications system is important to have, especially when dealing with the safety of children. The UNIVERGE 3C system and NEC support are great assets to the district's IT infrastructure that I would recommend to other school districts looking to upgrade their systems and reduce cost."*

Strong Relationship with Customer

One of NEC's strengths is working with customers to develop a deep understanding of their technical pain points and then implementing solutions that are customized to meet their needs. According to Potter, Medicine Hat School District chose NEC because of its customer experience and technology innovation. The quality of NEC's unified communications solutions consistently need less maintenance and have lower failure rates, and are competitively priced and provide for lower, ongoing service expenses. NEC's software and networking solutions helped provide a robust communications and collaboration tool and reduced costs, while providing the school district with a system that is flexible and easily manageable, with the added benefit of being able to expand and add more features as needed.

"Before installing UNIVERGE 3C, our biggest pain point was that our service costs were escalating significantly year after year. The stability of the system just wasn't there. Many times I would go to meetings and get complaints about the phone system, something that I should not hear on a daily or even on a monthly basis," said Potter. *"Post NEC, I really have to ask people about the phone system because there are no complaints or issues. The system is like a pen you pick up from your desk and just start using. It's that reliable and available."*