

Voorhees College



Customer

- Voorhees College, USA

Industry

- Higher education

Challenges

- High total cost of ownership (TCO)
- Expensive, proprietary equipment
- Difficult-to-manage system
- Inter-campus, long-distance toll charges

Solution

- Communication framework: UNIVERGE®360
- Communication system: UNIVERGE Spherical
- UC applications: UNIVERGE Spherical Desktop
- WLAN connection: Sprint MPLS network
- Media gateway: UNIVERGE Spherical BranchHub™
- Terminals: Off-the-shelf IP phones
- Management: Spherical Manager

Results

- 40% reduction in TCO (new system pays for itself)
- Time savings with four-digit dialing
- Improved employee productivity with popular UC

applications

- Reduced decision latency
- Disaster recovery
- Failover
- Easy system management

Decades ago, historically black colleges such as Voorhees, Howard and Tuskegee largely competed with each other for top-quality students and faculty members. Today, these colleges routinely vie with top-tier state and private four-year institutions and must use every available strategy to distinguish themselves in a hotly contested marketplace. A defining moment in the 111 year history of the college was the decision to use technology for strategic advantage.

In 2006, Voorhees decided to replace its traditional telephone system and Centrex service with the UNIVERGE Spherical IP solution from NEC Sphere Communications, Inc. (formally Sphere Communications, Inc.) The college was able to dramatically cost reduce while improving productivity on its four campuses. Tim Kentopp, Voorhees chief technology officer (CTO) says, “Having the lowest-cost, world-class IP telephony solution with the most advanced unified communications feature set certainly gives us an edge, and we are putting all the money we have saved to very good use.”

Challenges

Prior to 2006, when Voorhees had a digital switch, its telephones were analog so students, faculty and staff had few features. As a result, decision-latency and telephone frustration were rampant. Thanks to its Centrex service and outdated copper infrastructure, the college was paying a high price and receiving minimal value.

In 2001, the college's regional Bell operating company (RBOC) installed a fiber optic network throughout the main campus, solving its outdated-wiring problem. The school also had a dependable Ethernet network installed. Recurring costs were out of line, however. When Kentopp arrived at Voorhees in 2002, “We were paying \$20,000 per month for telephone service, and that did not include Internet or long distance,” he says.

Kentopp began finding ways to trim costs and improve services. However, as the college established continuing education campuses in other cities, longdistance toll charges escalated out of sight. “As well, we could not transfer inbound calls between campuses.”

Challenges (Cont.)

Another challenge was proprietary equipment: "Aside from the added expense, we were dependent on our RBOC for moves, adds and changes." The situation came to a head in 2006 when the RBOC said it would no longer support the legacy switch.

Solution

After investigating numerous solutions, Kentopp concluded, "UNIVERGE Sphericall gave us everything anyone else could at about half the price!" Kentopp was particularly impressed with UNIVERGE Sphericall's value-approach to licensing. "You pay one combined application license," he says. "Everyone else has separate licensing fees for each application so you pay far more."

In 2007, Kentopp had the UNIVERGE Sphericall solution installed. It is currently providing service to 29 buildings on five sites—about 1,100 phones in all. The solution includes four-digit dialing throughout with wide-area network (WAN) links to remote campuses via Sprint's MPLS network. Kentopp specified IP phones throughout. "I treated this as our once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get the IP telephony solution that gives Voorhees a clear competitive advantage both in cost and productivity," he says.

UNIVERGE Sphericall aligns well with the UNIVERGE360 framework in which the role of the user determines the best communication method and technology. Thanks to UNIVERGE Sphericall's open architecture, faculty, staff and students have easy access to the people and information they need.

One example of a role empowered by UNIVERGE Sphericall is the director of Admissions, Joseph Montgomery, who uses a softphone on his wireless laptop and is able to call anywhere when he is on the road via the Sphericall system. "This gives us an advantage when quick decisions may mean getting top-notch candidates. Our technology also wows candidates and strongly positions us as a first-rate institution," says Montgomery.

Faculty members, administrators and students use Sphericall in different ways based on their roles. However, UNIVERGE Sphericall is versatile enough to unify all of the college's communications needs.

Results

Kentopp estimates that UNIVERGE Sphericall is saving his college approximately 40 percent of what it used to spend on telecommunications, or about \$8,000 per month.

"We have far more features, far fewer telephone frustrations, less decision latency, and we have a state-of-the-art telephony system with advanced unified communications (UC) features," he says. Kentopp mentions popular UC features:

- **Rich presence provided by Windows® Outlook calendaring integrated into UNIVERGE Sphericall's Desktop presence.** "You know where they are and when they will be available."
- **Unified messaging that allows users to drag-and-drop a voice message to a folder or forward a voice message to someone else.** "This is phenomenal!" says Kentopp.
- **Instant messaging between desktops over UNIVERGE Sphericall Desktop client.** "That is a hit, especially with Campus Security, Residential Life and our administrative assistants."
- **Campus-wide address book.** "The faculty loves the fact they can look up any student and click to dial. It saves them a lot of time."
- **Full-featured phones with multi-line displays.**

Kentopp says UNIVERGE Sphericall's most powerful advantage is its openness. "Its pure software solution is system agnostic. It loads on any standard server. For example, to obtain redundancy, we set up a new server in another building so we now have continuity in case of a disaster. With primary rate interfaces (PRIs) and media gateways, we have failover in case of a network outage. And now we don't pay for moves, adds and changes; the UNIVERGE Sphericall Manager makes it easy to do them in-house." Kentopp likes the fact that UNIVERGE Sphericall plays well with E911. As well, he intends to implement a mass-notification-via-text-mail solution on his Sphericall in the near future.

About...

Voorhees College is a private, coeducational institution affiliated with the Episcopal Church with its main campus in Denmark, South Carolina, and continuing education campuses in Charleston and Columbia, SC; and August GA. Since it was founded in 1897, Voorhees has evolved into a leading four-year liberal arts college fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.