



ITB USES MICROSOFT OCS TO ENHANCE STUDENT SERVICES

The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB) is based in Dublin and is one of Ireland's 14 Institutes of Technology. It was established in 1999 and has grown rapidly in size over the last 10 years. The mission of the Institute is to serve its students and the community by meeting the skills needs in the economy and increasing the level of participation in third-level education and training.

The Challenge

The Institute has a population of 2500 students, 90 academic staff, and 110 administration and support personnel. The large modern campus is spread over six buildings. This presents some challenges when it comes to efficient communications. With such a large campus and extensive workforce, effective communication is vitally important to both the students and the staff at the Institute.

ITB decided that they needed a Unified Communications (UC) solution to address their complex communications requirements. After extensively evaluating several UC solutions, they selected Microsoft Office Communication Server (OCS), because it offered ease of implementation, cost savings and user familiarity.

ITB realised early on that the key to a successful project outcome was the integration of the OCS feature set with their existing telecoms system. Damovo, a Microsoft Gold Partner, had been their telephony partner for many years. Dave Curran, IT Manager at the Institute comments:

“Damovo's intimate knowledge of the Institute's existing Aastra PBX telephony infrastructure, coupled with the familiarity of our technical support team, made them a perfect partner for this project. Right away there was a natural fit between Damovo and ourselves.”

COMMUNICATION IS NOW MUCH MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE

The Project

The first step was a detailed discussion between ITB and Damovo. ITB outlined their requirements and ambitions for the project. Damovo then delivered a project plan which detailed implementation timescales, project deliverables, knowledge transfer, document management, and disaster recovery features.

Damovo integrated the Institute's Aastra MD110 PBX phone system with the Microsoft OCS solution. The technology was then initially rolled out to a pilot group of 25 administration users. This was an important first step - both to gain user acceptance and also to identify any operational issues before the solution was implemented on a larger scale across the campus.

OCS was then rolled out on a wider scale to a project team on the academic side - so that they could see the benefits of the technology. As time went on, more and more staff started to use it. Dave explains:

"We thought it would take six to eight months to roll out. We actually had a working solution within four months - which was fantastic."

The Results

One of the key benefits of integrating OCS with the Institute's telephony infrastructure is that all staff members who are on the system can see their colleagues' availability. This allows them to know if the other person is free, on the phone, in a meeting, busy, away or offline, simply by looking at their presence status on the Communicator screen. This makes communication far more efficient as the user can tell whether a colleague is likely to be able to take a call or respond immediately to an email. If not, they can schedule a call-back for when that person becomes free. This function has proven to be very popular with users as Dave explains:

"Happily we are now in a situation where we have an automated system - our Unified Communications Server - which allows us to sit at a console, see if individuals are available, and initiate contact at a time that suits. This has significantly improved the level of satisfaction and productivity amongst users."



Call Routing

The integration with the phone system also makes call handling easier. The user will initially receive an incoming call on their desk phone. If it is not answered within 10 seconds then it goes onto the individual's PC soft phone. If it is not answered within another 20 seconds it will be diverted to their voicemail. An email alert will then be sent to let them know they have missed a call, and in some cases received a voice mail. Dave comments:

"One of the unforeseen benefits of this system is that rather than having to access your voicemails when returning to the office, you can see them instantly on email. For me personally, this is one of the most useful aspects of the application. I don't have to spend time trawling through messages that may not be important. It allows me to prioritise voicemails from known individuals that may need immediate assistance - making me more responsive and effective."



The remote desktop feature has reduced the number of physical call outs by 33%.



MICROSOFT OCS WILL FACILITATE DISTANCE LEARNING AND COMBINED LECTURES

Remote Desktop Sharing

The remote desktop sharing function has also improved efficiencies. The IT technicians can now look at another colleague's desktop from their own desk, identifying and in some instances rectifying IT issues remotely. Dave estimates that they have seen a 33% reduction in the amount of physical callouts that the IT technicians have to make as a result of this functionality. This saves them time travelling between buildings on the campus, and also means that issues are resolved much more quickly and efficiently - which has a knock on effect for the end user.

The Future

In the coming months, the Institute has big plans for how Microsoft OCS can enhance the services it offers to its students. The live meeting component of OCS will allow the Institute to deliver distance learning to students who may not be able to attend the campus physically. Dave explains:

"The world of education is changing and for many years we have been searching for a mechanism that would allow us to contact potential students in remote parts of Ireland. We see Live Meeting as being a key component in this as it allows the academic/tutor to deliver course content by a variety of means - either through



video/web conferencing, powerpoint presentations, or excel spreadsheets. Not only will they be able to remotely participate in the session but they will also be able to actively interact with the tutor and indeed with fellow students. All they need is access to a PC."

Another exciting benefit of the Live Meeting component is that it will allow Blanchardstown and other institutes to share a knowledge base by delivering combined lectures. This will deliver huge benefits to the students not only in Blanchardstown - but across the other 13 Institutes of Technology in Ireland.

A Successful Project

Dave concludes:

"A key piece of advice that I can offer to anyone who is embarking on a similar project is to engage with a Microsoft Gold Certified partner at the earliest stage, to maximise the advice and insight such a partner can give you to tailor the project to your specific needs. From the offset, Damovo acted as consultants, working with the resident technical support team. My technicians are now confident that they have a resource that they can easily manage. On the back of that we now have ongoing support from Damovo and Microsoft."

Commenting on the project with ITB, John McCabe, managing director of Damovo Ireland says:

"Microsoft Unified Communications solutions deliver significant savings in terms of productivity, whilst improving efficiencies within our client organisations. Blanchardstown IT is a perfect example of how Unified Communications can deliver significant savings in terms of both time and money, whilst at the same time improving efficiencies across the organisation. Their foresight will revolutionise the way third level education is delivered across Ireland."



Damovo's intimate knowledge of our existing PBX infrastructure made them a perfect partner for this project.

