American InterContinental University Graduates to VoIP with Citel

Portico™ Telephone VoIP Adapter (TVA™) units enable the move to an IP PBX

"By purchasing Citel's Portico TVAs and a 3Com NBX 100, AIU-LA was able to save at least $500 per person. Rather than spending $800,000 for a new IP PBX and IP telephones, we spent only $200,000 for the Citel and NBX solution, making it the obvious choice."

"The Citel TVAs make our Nortel telephones [that are several years old] work like new IP telephones. TVAs are also much easier to support than IP telephones and provide excellent telecommunications service."

American InterContinental University – Los Angeles (AIU-LA) is rapidly expanding to competitively address a new surge in higher-education student populations, now that the children of baby boomers have reached college age. The AIU-LA campus, one of seven campuses in the United States, has seen its student population sharply increase, putting more strain on its existing resources. AIU-LA is a global community with campuses on three continents and students from more than 100 countries. The University's goal is to provide a dynamic environment that allows students to learn and grow. In this vibrant environment, students can gain the valuable knowledge, skills, and the Associate, Bachelor's and Master's degrees they will need to compete in fields such as Business Administration, Criminal Justice, International Business, Interior Design, Enterprise Management, Fashion Design, Fashion Marketing, Information Technology, Interior Design, Media Production and Visual Communications. The University prides itself on introducing dynamic modern ideas and combining them with essential traditional elements to provide students with a progressive and contemporary educational experience. This approach is also reflected in methods deployed by the University's entire team to address its growing needs.

New Challenges Require New Solutions

The University was building new labs, classrooms and executive offices and was facing several challenges as its programs and facilities grew. Its telephone system – Nortel Networks' Meridian® 1 Option 11 PBX – was unable to support the expansion and new user needs. In addition, providing higher quality communication services to students was imperative. The University's information technology staff needed to implement new, feature-rich IP telephony communications tools that would answer growing user demands while also preserving existing investments in traditional telecommunications equipment.

As new employees, administrators and faculty were hired, existing staff frequently moved from one office or floor to another. At least once or twice a week, the IT team had to call their telecom equipment reseller to facilitate any moves, adds and changes to the existing Nortel telephone system. These changes were becoming increasingly expensive, inefficient and inconvenient. The University's IT director wanted a system that they could maintain and manage on their own.

Running customized reports was also a challenge. The admissions director uses call reports to track the number of students contacting the University to obtain information and applications. In addition, University representatives continuously call potential students and need to generate reports that measure how many students are being contacted, while also tracking how many of those students call back to speak with the admissions department. To ensure that the University recruits the right number of students each term, several customized reports are required. With its old PBX system, the University had to contract with an outside technician to run these reports at $150 per hour, or double that rate for emergency requests. It also took 72-hours for the reports to be finished.

In addition, the University saw an opportunity to benefit from new IP-enabled features such as messaging, telecommuter support, and computer-telephone integration – features the Meridian couldn't offer. Simply put, the Meridian® PBX was not meeting the University's expanding needs, and it was time to upgrade. AIU-LA's goals included: expanding its telephone system's capacity and capabilities, reducing maintenance and service expenses, and migrating to IP telephony while minimizing the impact on existing users.

To facilitate the school's accelerating growth and system demands, the University's IT team began evaluating telecommunications solutions that would let them roll out IP telephony gradually - and at a reasonable total cost of ownership.

AIU-LA does its VoIP Homework

Silvio Cantillo, information technology director of the University, is a firm believer in the benefits of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and set out to find a suitable solution to replace its old Nortel TDM switch. The IT team evaluated several solutions from IP PBX vendors, but they were all cost prohibitive. AIU-LA still had 265 Nortel Networks Meridian® 1 telephones, which though several years old, worked well, and suited its users' needs. To purchase a new IP PBX and new IP telephones would be very costly, in addition to the necessary LAN upgrades, rewiring and associated costs of migrating to VoIP.

Citel Scores 100 Percent

After extensive research, Cantillo and his IT team discovered they could simplify and reduce the cost of migrating to IP telephony by deploying Citel Portico™ Telephone VoIP Adapter (TVA™) units with 3Com's NBX® 100 Communications System. The University would be able to continue utilizing its existing Nortel telephones while delivering new IP telephony applications from the NBX®, for a fraction of the cost of deploying IP telephones. According to Cantillo, purchasing a new telephone system and IP phones for each user would have cost $800-$900 per person. "By purchasing the TVAs and an NBX® 100, AIU-LA was able to save at least $500 per person. Rather than spending $800,000 for a new IP PBX and IP telephones, we spent only $200,000, making Citel and NBX® the obvious choice," adds Cantillo.

In fact, using Portico TVAs with the NBX® switch made the transition to IP cost-competitive with just upgrading the Nortel Networks Meridian® 1 TDM switch. While the vast majority of users have kept their Meridian® 1 telephones, the University also purchased 20 new 3Com IP telephones for its executives. With Citel, the University's staff required little to no training during the transition as all of their most commonly used phone features were retained. Button features on the Meridian® 1 telephones were mapped to the same locations, with the same functionality.

The NBX® features software that simplifies management and offers flexible, multi-site IP connectivity options. In addition, the NBX® provides a host of powerful, built-in call processing features, including voicemail, automated attendant, hunt/call groups, call detail reporting, computer telephony integration (CTI), PC-based visual voicemail/email clients (IMAP4), and more. It also simplifies day-today operations with easy-to-use built-in administration and user programming utilities.

A Quick Study in Multiple Benefits

In the Summer of 2005, the University created a new media department, adding new labs and classrooms as it continued to grow. Moving people around, adding new phones, and supporting new users hasn't been a problem with the new system. According to Cantillo, "The Citel TVAs make our Nortel telephones work like new IP telephones. TVAs are also much easier to support than IP telephones and provide excellent telecommunications service. Now, if someone moves to a different floor, we can do our own administration via the web and the user is up and running in five minutes. We're saving a lot of money on maintenance and moves, adds and changes by not having to pay a technician's service charge. This also allows us to deliver 24x7 service to our students, faculty and staff - something we couldn't offer with the old Nortel system."

Another advantage of the new system is its call detail recording (CDR) capability, enabling the University to track telephone calls, 911 calls, and specific 800 numbers – without having to install special hardware and software. In the technology world, few things - including migrating to new VoIP technology - go without a hitch. However, since the Portico TVA is also so easy to install and user-friendly, there is no need to visit each desktop to switch out/upgrade equipment or retrain telephone users. "After the new telephone system was installed, the users had no idea that there was a change because their familiar handset functionality was retained," notes Cantillo.

Moving to the Future

With Citel's Portico TVAs and the NBX® switch, staff and faculty now benefit from applications such as unified messaging which allows the user to access both text and voicemail messages from Outlook Express, to listen to voicemail messages over their PC, or email messages over their Meridian® 1 telephone. Voice messages are stored in the user's email inbox just like text-based email messages, and users can simply double click on the message to listen to it on the PC. Managers and sales representatives can access messages from anywhere, enabling them to be more productive and make better use of their time. These types of advanced IP capabilities would have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars in upgrade costs to the old TDM Meridian® 1 PBX.

Citel and 3Com are making it easier for AIU-LA to reap the benefits of IP telephony today, enabling the University to reduce telecommunications costs and meet its goal of offering the finest education for its students.

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