

Pepperdine University— 'Converging' Upon a Unified Approach



A robust, effective, and reliable communications system is crucial to a sound educational infrastructure. Many higher education institutions add value to their communications foundation by adopting advanced systems that offer an expanded feature set. Pepperdine University's Telecommunications Services department is adding value by providing tools that deliver enhanced functionality to existing communication services for students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

Nearing the end of their service contract with Octel—the university's voice mail provider during the 1990s—Pepperdine decided to make the switch to unified messaging. As part of a pilot program begun in June 2001, Telecommunications Services rolled out a Cisco Unity Unified Messaging solution to a group of 100 subscribers on campus.

"As a university, it's important for us to be current technologically," says Stu Warford, director, Telecommunications Services. "We did see that the convergence of voice and data is a trend in the industry and we reflected upon that as we made our

decision. Cisco Unity fits very well with our strategic decision to implement Unified Messaging since it brings together the voice and data worlds."

Putting People in Control of Their Communications

Cisco Unity brings centralized communications control to system subscribers at Pepperdine by delivering every e-mail, voice, and fax message to a single inbox. With Cisco Unity, subscribers have the freedom to access and manage all their messages using a touchtone telephone or any PC with Internet connectivity. Pepperdine students, faculty, and staff can listen to their e-mail over the telephone, check voice messages from the Internet, and—once their third-party fax module is fully integrated—forward faxes to any local fax machine.

"We've gotten positive feedback from the pilot group on the Cisco Unity feature set," Warford notes. "Although we decided to defer fax testing for now, pilot subscribers still enjoyed the unified messaging functionality—especially the fact that they can see voice messages right in their Exchange e-mail inbox."

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Voice Messaging and System Administration with a Difference

Along with powerful unified messaging functionality, Cisco Unity also offers voice messaging with a robust automated attendant, intelligent routing, and easily programmable call handlers. Cisco Unity's Web-based system administration console makes it easy for IT staff to manage these features.

"It's been very straightforward to set up mailboxes, call handlers, and the like," says Warford. "We're giving departments the option to let us set up menus and applications just for them. We can create caller menus, interview handlers, and automatic call distribution systems in Cisco Unity that meet a department's specific needs. We can even direct incoming calls to off campus numbers."

Pepperdine subscribers can also use ActiveAssistant—Cisco Unity's browser-based personal administration interface—to customize their own voice mail and messaging options. "The pilot group likes the fact that they can self-administer a number of features and even set up their own notification parameters," says Warford. "We have it set up so that subscribers can access ActiveAssistant when they're off campus, so it's really convenient."

Smooth Migration on the Horizon

After a month of testing, Telecommunications Services declared the pilot program a success. The department has now finalized its administrative processes for setting up new subscribers and building customized departmental messaging applications, and is ready for the next step—full migration of all university Octel customers by the end of November 2001. When full migration is complete, Cisco Unity will serve approximately 3,500 students, faculty, and staff on campus.

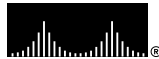
"We feel very comfortable with the administration of the Unity system," Warford notes. "There's not much to it—I've been happy to see that—and we anticipate a smooth migration as a result."

Cisco Unity can also pave the way for a smooth migration to a fully converged network. As an integral part of the Cisco AVVID (Architecture for Voice, Video and Integrated Data) environment, Cisco Unity complements a full range of Cisco IP-based voice solutions, including Cisco CallManager. In fact, Cisco Unity integrates with leading legacy PBX systems—which is what Pepperdine currently has—and provides simultaneous support for CallManager and legacy PBXs to facilitate migration to IP telephony while leveraging existing infrastructure investments. Migration to an IP network can also lower an institution's total cost of ownership. For example, Cisco Unity's software-only integration with CallManager simplifies installation and reduces hardware and maintenance expenses, yielding significant savings.

For now, the campus community at Pepperdine continues to reap the benefits of a unified messaging system that works with their existing telephone system. "The pilot group really enjoyed receiving all their messages in on inbox," says Warford. "When we asked for feedback on Cisco Unity many of the participants responded in essentially the same way: 'Hey, this is very cool stuff!'"



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