Technical College Boosts Student and Faculty Collaboration

Madison Area Technical College deploys advanced communications platform with an eye for the future of education.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**MADISON AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE**
- Higher Education
- Madison, Wisconsin
- Approximately 44,000 individuals annually; 915 full time faculty members, staff and administrators; approximately 1,000 part time faculty members

**BUSINESS CHALLENGE**
- Expand distance learning programs and improve collaboration, while enhancing the learning environment through scaling expertise
- Reduce costs and increase administrative and operational efficiency
- Maintain competitiveness and increase enrollment

**NETWORK SOLUTION**
- Single platform solution that reduces operational costs and improves service delivery
- Cisco Unified Communications and TelePresence solution

**BUSINESS RESULTS**
- 21st century collaboration tools to enhance learning experience, on and off campus
- Integrated, network platform for improved communications and collaboration
- Improved network bandwidth and connectivity, enabling students, faculty and staff to work and learn with the latest voice, video, data and web 2.0 tools

**Business Challenge**

Madison Area Technical College was looking to maintain a competitive edge and to further its role as a leader in educational innovation, providing top-tier technical instruction to students across its two Madison and four regional Wisconsin campuses. The College has a long history, dating back to 1912, of providing students top-notch instruction to help them succeed in the marketplace.

To achieve a 21st century standard of learning, Madison Area Technical College realized that it needed to provide a variety of advanced communications services to its students and enhance its popular distance learning program. By deploying key technologies across its campuses, the College is linking its past record of commitment to student learning with a determination to prepare them for the future by equipping them with skills needed in our evolving, globalized world.

The College’s decision to pursue a more sophisticated communications technology was based on the institution’s competition, not just from other schools, but from factors that affect students’ time and attention span. Today’s youth use increasingly sophisticated technology in their daily lives: iPods, SmartPhones, PDAs, web-based collaboration and social networking technologies, high-definition television, and more. College officials recognized that students have grown accustomed to a high level of quality, as well as variety, in their learning and communication methods and expect it to be matched in every area of their lives, particularly from a technical education.

“Accessibility to instruction was once enough of an offset that the technology didn’t have to be perfect,” says Roger Price, vice president of infrastructure services for Madison Area Technical College. “That’s no longer the case. Technology matters immensely in how we deliver our education to our students and communicate our value to prospective students.”
Network Solution

Cisco® Unified Communications was integrated to enhance overall communication throughout the college, including a platform to deliver superior customer service and collaboration opportunities to students, faculty and staff. In addition, Madison Area Technical College deployed Cisco TelePresence to create a live communication experience for distance learning over the network, giving access to capabilities unmatched by any other technical college in the country.

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—Roger Price, Vice President of Infrastructure Services, Madison Area Technical College

The College turned to Cisco, and partner Inacom Information Systems, for a Unified Communications platform and in particular Cisco TelePresence because it offers an innovative solution for distance learning, creating an “in-person” classroom experience over a converged network. As a first-of-its-kind deployment for community colleges, the new Cisco TelePresence positions Madison Area Technical College as a leader in its use of technology to enhance the quality of education for students.

TelePresence technologies transmit life-size, high-definition images, and spatial discrete audio to deliver real-time, face-to-face interaction between people at distant sites, using advanced visual, audio, and collaboration technologies. One benefit of the new distant learning platform is that the College is now able to efficiently deliver quality instruction across the wide area network from location to location regardless of the classroom geography. Easy, virtual access to counselors, academic advisors and other student service providers is further enabled, as well as the ability to reduce travel for meetings and internal training of staff and faculty.

By providing this advanced technology to its students, Madison Area Technical College is further supporting its mission to “deliver high-quality instruction and services that are responsive, flexible, and accessible.”

Business Results

The Cisco technology deployed at Madison Area Technical College gives the college an advantage over other area schools. The College faces competition from a variety of other higher education institutions, including the University of Wisconsin-Madison, ITT, the University of Phoenix, and Herzing College, among others. However, with the opportunities provided by Cisco Unified Communications and Cisco TelePresence, Madison Area Technical College will be able to offer students educational services not available at the other schools.

“There is no one else doing what we are trying to do right now, using this tool with a primarily academic focus,” says Price. “It’s a cool education tool; it’s a cool collaboration tool. Plus, it expands our educational opportunities. There are people out there who would love to get an MATC education, but they just haven’t been able to reach us. Now they can.”
Also, Cisco Unified Communications and TelePresence are "green technologies," which save the college money in a number of other areas. Faculty, staff, and students will have unprecedented ability to communicate, collaborate, and learn without regard to location. Travel expense is reduced, even as the number of student-faculty and student-student interactions increases, delivering a much more robust learning experience. The project timeline and financing were also structured to maximize efficiency in procurement and deployment of that technology. In a tough economic climate, Madison Area Technical College put in place new technologies that were cost effective and demonstrated a responsible budgetary decision.

“During the last few years, we have approached enrollment with the desire to grow,” says Bettsye Barhorst, president of Madison Area Technical College. “In fact, two years ago, we grew some 5 to 6 percent. Last year we dipped a bit, though we aim to maintain a healthy 2 percent a year, capturing what we feel are untapped groups of students who are going elsewhere at a premium cost.”

By reaching out to serve larger groups, Madison Area Technical College strives to provide an advanced technical education as a way to help people enhance their personal skills and knowledge base, a goal that will improve the quality of life of those in the Madison area in a time of economic uncertainty.

For More Information
To find out more about Cisco’s TelePresence solution, go to: http://www.cisco.com/en/US/netsol/ns669/networking_solutions_solution_segment_home.html