

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA

Upgrading the voice and data communication capabilities to support a large military base

The Background

More than 15,000 students attend the University of South Alabama (USA) in Mobile, AL. The university employs approximately 5,500 faculty and staff and consists of 10 schools and colleges. Its health system, including the College of Medicine, Mitchell Cancer Institute and two hospitals, provides state-of-the-art care for 250,000 patients annually.

The university is one of the fastest growing in the state and is undergoing a 10-year construction program valued in excess of \$475 million. Because of that, David Blough, Associate Vice President, University Computer Sciences, wanted to take advantage of new VoIP technologies to improve communications.

"We wanted to replace our aging telephone system," explained Mr. Blough. "It was installed in 1988, and we could no longer get parts for it and we couldn't upgrade it. We wanted to install new systems before the old one crashed and we wouldn't be able to get it back up."

He sought proposals for a multi-year, phased-in replacement of the current telecommunications systems. They were to be considered a long-term solution and be capable of meeting the university's current telecommunications and voice messaging needs and offer the potential for future enhancements and expansion.

What's Your Best Solution?

Mr. Blough took a novel approach when bidding out the project. Instead of putting together a typical 100-page bid specification, he put together a 6-page request for proposal describing the university's current voice and data environment and the desired solution. His goal was to deploy a cost-effective communications system that would minimize risk and appear seamless to end users during the multiphased migration

He wanted to increase capacity, gain flexibility, streamline operations and leverage his existing infrastructure. In addition, he also wanted the vendors to submit a detailed implementation plan as part of the RFP. "I wanted to know how the vendor will take us from our current box to a new box without totally disrupting campus communications," he added. "Hopefully, this way, we'll get the best solution each vendor has to offer instead of asking the vendor to fit to what we wanted," he said. His plan worked. After reviewing the proposals, he narrowed the list to three vendors. After site visits and presentations, he chose Black Box.

A New IP-based System, Less Manpower.

The university chose a new communications solution based on Black Box's recommendation. It gives the university an advanced IP-based communications, including capabilities such as mobility, centralized management, a standards-based, IT-oriented architecture, plus multimedia-enabled end-user communications.

"This new system can easily mesh with our legacy communications infrastructure, which still has a lot of life left in it," said Mr. Blough. "With this system and Black Box's help, we can manage our VoIP migration at our own pace. It's also reducing our manpower needs in doing moves, adds and changes," he added. "Departments are moving all the time. Now with VoIP, they can pick up their phone and move themselves."

A Well-planned, Phased-in Migration.

One of the primary reasons Mr. Blough chose Black Box was its implementation plan and its expertise and experience in supporting both older and newer technologies.

"Black Box is able to make the old and the new work together," he explained.

Project:

VoIP-based communications system

Major Benefit:

Cost-effective unified communications

Major Challenges:

Hybrid system
Phased migration

The older campus communications infrastructure consists of an aging copper backbone. Mr. Blough wanted to upgrade it, but he didn't have the budget to run new CAT6 cable and fiber throughout the campus. So Black Box devised a plan to use the existing infrastructure while migrating to the new system, one building at a time.

The multi-year plan developed by Black Box is enabling the university to upgrade its communications technology with minimal impact on end-users and with no disruption of campus communications. It's also helping the university build a foundation of IP telephony and advanced communications at a pace that makes financial and functional sense.

A Trusted Partner

From the initial bid through the communications migration, Black Box has earned the trust of the university team. "We have a lot of confidence in Black Box," said Mr. Blough. "Being familiar with the university and campus, they were able to meet our needs better than other vendors. They have a good understanding of what we need. And they give us very good technical help."

