



Making the Grade

AT&T VoIP service helps a small-town school district in Ottawa, Kans., get important calls on track.

About Ottawa City Schools

Although its population is fewer than 13,000 and its tallest structures are grain silos, Ottawa, Kans. is a portrait in contrast. Located about 50 miles southwest of Kansas City, the Ottawa City School District provides some of the most technologically advanced equipment to its nearly 2,500 students. Elementary school classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards, and secondary school classrooms use wireless air slates. LCD projectors are available in all classrooms, and personal computers are found districtwide. To keep its four elementary schools, middle school, high school and alternative learning center connected to the community at large, the district relies on AT&T for its phone and Internet access.

Situation

For years one of the busiest people in Ottawa was Janis Smith, the secretary in the school administration building. Because of limitations on the central office's telephone system, many calls coming into the district were routed to her desk rather than to the teachers or administrators for whom they were intended.

In 2006 the district switched its traditional phone system to the more flexible Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) system from AT&T. At the same time, the school district began using two high-capacity T-1 lines that could handle incoming and outgoing phone traffic for the entire district. Unfortunately, those lines could not provide unique individual caller IDs for calls originating from the school district's many buildings. Instead the phone system generated just one number for the entire school district—the number of the administration building. For many organizations this wouldn't be a problem, but it created a unique challenge for the Ottawa schools.

Like many other school systems, the Ottawa School District calls the parents of every child who is absent each day. Although school officials left voice messages that included a direct

callback number, many parents opted instead to use the number on their caller ID screens to return the call. Smith, who was responsible for fielding those calls, would have no idea which school official a parent wanted to reach, leaving both parties no choice but to guess, a particularly annoying development when parents had children attending different schools. "It was as if we had one phone number for our entire school district," recalls Bob Becker, director of technology for the district. "It was a real hassle. Parents were complaining to the school board."

Solution

When Carol Cowger, the AT&T account manager for Ottawa Public Schools, learned of the newly available AT&T IP Flexible

Ottawa City School District Facts

- **Business Needs**
Phone service that can support fully functional caller ID services
- **Networking Solution**
AT&T IP Flexible Reach, a managed VoIP communications solution that can also handle inbound and outgoing calls
- **Business Value**
Each channel is bundled with 300 minutes, which saves the school district money on its calling plan.
- **Industry Focus**
Public education
- **Size**
Nearly 2,500 students in seven learning institutions

Reach service, she immediately knew that it would be a cost-effective solution to the school district's phone problems. AT&T IP Flexible Reach is an integrated VoIP communications solution that supports Internet access, inbound and outbound calls, and fully functional caller ID services. Cowger also knew that because the school district had already upgraded its phone system and installed its own fiber-optic network, connecting to the new service would be a snap. "Once it became available, things moved pretty fast," Becker notes. "We signed up in December, and by March it was installed."

Head of the Class

In addition to improving communications within the district's administration building, the new service saves the school district money. Each calling channel offered through the IP Flexible Reach Line comes bundled with 300 minutes of off-net, long-distance calling. Having signed up for 23 channels, the school district has enough long-distance capacity that it has been able to eliminate its long-distance calling plan, saving an estimated \$200 to \$300 a month. As the district continues to upgrade its communications network, even more will be saved.

"AT&T IP Flexible Reach has really improved the way we can communicate with our students and their parents."

—Bob Becker, Director of Technology, Ottawa City School District, Kans.

Now parents can reach school officials without hassle, but they're not the only ones who are satisfied; Becker is also delighted with the upgrade. "The IP Flexible Reach service isn't just more sophisticated than our old service, it's also more reliable," he says. "Saving money on our long-distance calling has been a good deal too; we now pay almost nothing for long-distance service." From a public-relations standpoint, and from the point of view of district secretary Smith, a fully functioning caller ID service is the biggest benefit of all. "It's really improved the way we can communicate with our students and their parents," Becker says. "Janis has plenty of other things to do, and now she has time to do them."

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