

Centralization, Flexibility and Reliability:

Baker Communications Provides Communications Overhaul Of Leading Rural School System



The Humboldt Community School District is a rural school district in northern Iowa serving approximately 1250 students in several buildings. One of its key educational goals is to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the ability to access, apply, and adapt to information and technology. This requires a LAN / WAN communications system that interfaces securely and easily with the student population.

The Challenge of Communications In Transition

In late 2003, the Humboldt Community School district was relying on an old, piecemeal and volunteer-built communications system that was not easy to maintain and was impossible to adapt to the demands of modern technology.

Prior to her arrival to the district, Superintendent Dr. Joyce Judas acknowledges that there were many reasons for the school's pre-existing approach to technology, most of which had to do with attempts at cost-saving. However, the prior phone system had become, in her words, "antiquated."

But Humboldt had more than telephone issues. Their entire data infrastructure was in need of a significant overhaul.

Two major issues needed to be addressed at the same time: the out-of-date phone system and a problematic data network. The parallel challenges of improving the phones and upgrading the old, decentralized (and formerly Mac-based) network were daunting.

Tony Richardson, Technology Coordinator for the district, was hired in part to assist Humboldt Schools in the quest to transform the existing network into a more efficient system.

"There was so much network contention due to the hub infrastructure and the huge demands that the PCs were already putting on it, that a lot of times, certain sections of the network would just shut down. People couldn't even log in," said Richardson.

The Right Assessment for the Right Solution

Richardson developed a proposal to get an assessment done. Baker Communications won the initial bid and was able to provide the documentation that Dr. Judas needed to verify to the school board that the LAN was unstable, the WAN was vulnerable and that the phones need to be updated and integrated into the overall system.

"There was no doubt Baker Communications was the most qualified to perform the assessment," said Richardson.

Baker Communication's assessment showed that the district's communication environment lacked efficiency and security. The existing WAN was vulnerable to complete failure and could not support VoIP traffic or adapt to technological demands for applications such as streaming media. The existing telephone systems were no longer produced or supported.

Humboldt Community School District

Public Elementary, Middle School and High School System

Humboldt, Iowa

183 Employees in multiple locations

Challenge

Upgrade existing communications infrastructure

Account for mobile faculty and staff

Contribute to the greater education, safety and community of students

Network Solution

ShoreTel IP Telephone solution and Foundry Networks LAN upgrade

Results

Centralized communications network

Enabled employees to communicate from any location

Improved student educational environment

Humboldt Schools needed flexibility and a way to centralize all communications that would allow them to make changes to their own phone system – without having to call in an outside firm.



The LAN consisted of hubs whose bandwidth were at capacity and could not grow to suit new instructional technology.

Humboldt School District needed flexibility and a way to centralize all communications that would allow them to make changes to their own phone system – without having to call in an outside firm. The school needed to go from two separate, cobbled-together, decentralized voice and data systems to one centralized converged communications system that offers flexibility for future needs and growth.

With the assessment in hand, Dr. Judas was prepared to brief the board and secure funding for improvements through School Infrastructure Local Option (SILO) grant monies.

Also at that time, because of the relationship Baker Communications had established with the district, they were able to alert Judas and Richardson to the availability of deeply discounted Foundry network switches available through a state contract. The switches were necessary for the replacement of the LAN.

Implementation

After the assessment, the Humboldt School District was fully prepared to develop a request for proposals to provide, install and support an integrated voice solution. The district took bids from seven companies.

They chose Baker Communications.

Judas said, “Since we already had a trusted relationship with Baker Communications, it was of great benefit when they won the bid. They provided counsel so we could make the most informed decisions throughout the process. From the beginning, they communicated with us. ‘We want to work with you – we’re interested in what you are doing and we want to be a part of it.’”

After the installation, Richardson was able to take over the management of the local area network from a centralized location. More than that, he found that the highly trained people of Baker Communications were available to him every step of the way.

“From our account rep through all the engineers, Baker Communications knew their product. They knew exactly what we wanted. It was like they could read our minds. They listened to our needs such as our desire to integrate email and telephone and all of our communications into one package,” said Richardson.

Judas agreed. “The level of expertise they displayed in educating us really told us how qualified they were. Baker Communications could talk about the total communications system. If you’ve ever been a superintendent, you don’t want to put in any system that doesn’t work for everyone. Because of their attention to detail, I knew I wasn’t going to get caught in that.”

The School needed to go from two separate, cobbled-together, decentralized voice and data systems to one centralized and mobile converged communications system.

“The system is intuitive, straightforward and extremely easy to upgrade.”

-Tony Richardson

Technology Coordinator
Humbolt Community School District

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-Dr. Joyce Judas

Superintendent
Humbolt Community School District



Equipment For Efficiency And Cost Savings

Baker Communications provided the Humboldt Community School buildings with 5 voice switches and more than 140 ShoreTel IP Telephones. Baker Communications replaced most of the analog trunks with one consolidated T1 that included direct inward dialing (DID). Baker Communications also provided a number of system applications, including call managers. They also provided fax servers and ongoing system support. The system design and installation took about three weeks and switchover was completed overnight.

The ShoreTel solution allows for the database to be distributed out to each ShoreGear Voice switch allowing different locations to operate on the network as independent work sites. It enables a completely distributed, scalable system layered on the IP network with no high-risk point of failure. The distributed ShoreTel system provides integrated voice applications through a single management interface. The initial administrator training consisted of a comprehensive four-hour long course from a Baker Communications technical expert, which is a fraction of the training demanded by most other approaches.

In addition to providing a major component of the Humboldt School centralized and unified communications upgrade, the new voice system also lowered the cost of ownership over the long-term.

“The system is intuitive, straight-forward and extremely easy to upgrade,” said Richardson.

More Than A System – A Relationship

The people at Baker Communications go beyond the sale. They win bids because of cost savings, but they win respect because of all the consultative help and suggestions they provide customers. Baker Communications employees point out potential funding sources for projects and will assess an organization’s overall network, not just what the short-term need may be.

Baker Communications provides on-going support and consultation, so that implementation is really only the beginning of the relationship. They are certified to sell a variety of leading company technologies, including Cisco, Juniper, Nortel, Foundry, Microsoft and ShoreTel. This expertise across a wide range of manufacturers allows Baker Communications to find the best, most cost-effective solution, regardless of the logo that may be on the box the equipment comes in.

Baker Communications was able to contribute to Humboldt Community Schools’ technological future due to its expertise, range of product offerings and execution of the project.

Baker Communications, which provides equipment, support and consultation for Humboldt Community Schools, provides a number of powerful features to meet the unique demands of large, multi-location facilities but can just as easily scale services to suit the needs, and budgets, of smaller operations.

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