



History in the Making

IPC and Mitel provide the venerable College of William and Mary with a 21st-century voice communications solution that will take it into the future.

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The College of William and Mary was chartered in 1693 by King William III and Queen Mary II of England. Its 1,200-acre campus includes the 311-year-old Sir Christopher Wren Building, the oldest college building in the U.S. Thomas Jefferson received his undergraduate degree there, and George Washington earned his surveyor's license through the college.

History is celebrated at the College of William and Mary, yet the institution is decidedly high-tech. It was named one of Intel's 50 "Most Unwired College Campuses" for its campus-wide wireless network. The Swem Library's Media Center boasts nine cutting-edge digital video and audio editing suites and a state-of-the-art Special Collections Research Center.

The college's 1980s-era PBX fit neither its storied past nor its high-tech future.

"We've run the same on-premises PBX for 20-something years," said Courtney Carpenter, CIO for the College of William and Mary. "It's a mid-1980s design that was purchased and installed in the late 1980s. It's an antique — as some of our guys say, it's old enough to drink. It was end-of-life in the mid-1990s and end-of-support around 2000 or so.

"We've kept it running thanks to some guys who used to work for the manufacturer who have a warehouse of parts that they've scavenged off old equipment. That company has provided two on-site technicians who handled all the day-to-day administration and maintenance of the PBX. As long as they could keep it running we were OK, but we were starting to have problems. It looked

as though we could have a major failure and lose all of our voice communications. It was time to replace it, and we selected the Mitel IP Communications solution through IPC Technologies.”

The Past Is Prologue

After obtaining funding for the project, Carpenter and his team issued an RFP for an IP telephony solution. The college received more than a dozen responses, representing all of the major telephone system manufactures. Carpenter concedes that Mitel was not their top pick at the outset.

“We had this perception that Mitel was more for smaller organizations, and we had about 8,000 lines at one point,” he said. “As a result, we were focused on the larger systems going into the RFP. But we had an open mind as we went through the process. After two months of testing we went with Mitel through IPC.”

The ease of use of the Mitel system was a key deciding factor. The college has a small IT staff that is very knowledgeable when it comes to data networking, but with limited telephony expertise. They needed a phone system that was easy to set up and manage.

“Mitel’s tagline is ‘brilliantly simple’ —and it really is,” said Carpenter. “Some of these phone systems are really complicated, but setting up and managing the Mitel system is straightforward. You don’t need weeks of training just to figure it out. That was a big plus.”

Staying Power

The Mitel technology also impressed the college. The Mitel system’s distributed architecture and applications, and its N+1 redundancy, help provide five-nines availability for mission-critical business continuity.

“A traditional PBX is a monolithic array of boxes sitting in a computer room with cabling and outside connections to the public telephone network. If we ever had a problem with that facility we would lose phones for weeks or months,” Carpenter said. “Because the Mitel system is distributed in various data centers around campus, we reduce that risk. Plus we can bring in multiple connections to

the public telephone network to make it even more resilient.”

The Mitel phone sets themselves were also appealing. Recognizing that the phone sets are what end-users see, Carpenter wanted to ensure that end-users would be happy with the endpoint.

“As we narrowed it down we actually put up test systems for the finalists and had a group of about 80 users come through and test the phones,” he said. “Overwhelmingly they liked Mitel. The instruments are intuitive, easy to use and well made.

“Mitel’s straightforward licensing structure was also appealing. A basic license covers most everything you need except for call center applications. And Mitel had the best price point by far. We got the price we wanted and our first choice from a technology standpoint. Everything came together.”

Now and Then

IPC Technologies completed the package. IPC created a test bed and made the Mitel system “talk” to the old PBX.

“We did not want to do a flash cutover of all phones. We wanted to roll it out over several months,” said Carpenter. “At the same time, we wanted to maintain five-digit dialing between endpoints, so the two systems had to talk to each other seamlessly. That was a challenge, given that our system is so old, but IPC made it happen.

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On the one hand, it might seem fitting that the second-oldest college in the nation would have a phone system nearly three decades old. However, the College of William and Mary is a vibrant “public Ivy” school and cutting-edge research university. It needed a reliable phone system that would better serve its voice communications needs. IPC Technologies and Mitel provided a state-of-the-art IP communications solution that will take the 318-year-old college into the future.



IPC delivers IT solutions that help organizations become more agile, productive and profitable. We specialize in best-of-breed cloud services, carrier services and on-premises solutions from industry-leading providers, and provide professional and managed services that maximize the efficiency of our customers’ operations. We have served as a trusted advisor to our customers since 1981, employing a consultative approach that ensures each solution makes good economic sense and delivers an attractive return on investment.