Republic Polytechnic

Enhancing Student-Staff Communications

Case Study

Republic Polytechnic, Singapore's newest polytechnic, has taken its electronic-campus vision a step further with the implementation of an advanced voice communications system that runs across the school's wireless Internet Protocol (IP) network. The IP telephony system from Cisco Systems was chosen over a traditional private branch exchange (PBX) telephone system because it allowed the polytechnic to realize its vision for a collaborative and mobile IT-enabled working and learning environment. Moreover, campus staff can access a variety of communications tools including e-mail, instant messaging and now telephony with integrated SMS and phone book capabilities from NexLabs to keep in touch with one another over the school's wireless and wired network.

The Cisco IP telephony solution includes Cisco IP phones in the administrative offices, Cisco CallManager for software-based call processing, Cisco Unity Unified Messaging; and Cisco IP Communicator on the laptops and personal computers of Republic's staff. The Cisco IP Communicator is a software-based application that endows desktop computers or laptops with the functionality of IP phones. NexLabs, Cisco's first IP Telephony Application Developer in Singapore, provided software solutions such as SMARTCab, SMARTSms, SMARTDirectory, and IP Phone Essentials. These enhance the IP Phone infrastructure with value added voice-data converged applications.

Republic Polytechnic was established in 2002 and currently serves more than 1,900 students. The vision to incorporate IT into the school's operations was conceptualised from its inception, to save the polytechnic from the hassle of having to maintain disparate networks and to migrate the system later as needs evolve. Building a robust and resilient IP network that can deliver voice, video and data, also provides the school with a platform that can easily scale as it grows. Republic's leaders would like to increase student enrollment to 13,000 by 2010.

"The vision at Republic Polytechnic is to create a totally wireless and mobile environment for our staff. All our staff are equipped to be truly mobile, next-generation knowledge workers. As our society progresses to being more 'e', we are embracing technology tools that will allow us to become more effective workers wherever we are and whenever the time.

The adoption of IP telephony is a strong case in point of how we can minimise our fixed-line costs, while enhancing our communications with our clients — be they stakeholders, parents, teachers, the media — as we are now fully connected wherever we are," said Prof Low Teck Seng, Principal and CEO, Republic Polytechnic.

"The solution also offers other value-added services, which enables the phone to be used not only for voice communication but also for uses such as information retrieval, text messaging and resource management. More importantly, Republic is able to use the platform as a basis for academic projects," added Prof Low.

NexLabs' value-added telephony applications enable Republic staff with a fully integrated directory search infrastructure consisting of staff, student and even personal phone books. The phone book integration allows a lecturer the simplicity of searching for a student contact from the IP phone and contacting the student immediately via a one-touch interface. The lecturer can even search for all students he mentors by simply entering his lecturer ID. After listing the students, he can choose to contact them via SMS or via phone calls.

"By embracing the latest in communication technology, our facilitators can now communicate more efficiently with their students. Changes in schedules, project reminders or even surveys/quizzes can be efficiently conveyed/launched via SMS within seconds," says Mr Warren Wang, Deputy Director for Planning and Technology.

With NexLabs value added solutions, the Cisco IP Phone System is transformed into a fully integrated and unified communication infrastructure. At Replublic, it helps to improve the ease of staff-student communication and to reap significant productivity through quick access to information-- all at the touch of a button!

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