Ridley College: Enhancing and Unifying Communications within and beyond the Classroom

Organization: Ridley College
Industry: Education, K-12
Application: FirstClass Collaborative Groupware and Unified Communications
Results:
• improved communications among students, teachers, administrative staff and the community
• enabled teachers to securely and easily share valuable resources and best practices regardless of device and location
• saved teachers valuable preparation time
• enriched the learning experience for students by providing access to all
• allowed students from international countries to speak to their parents on a regular basis
• low total cost of ownership in comparison to other communication systems

About Ridley College

Ridley College was established in 1889 by a group of Anglican clergy and laymen eager to establish a school for boys in Ontario that emphasized strong academic and religious values. The St. Catharines, Ontario-based school was originally known as Bishop Ridley College, in tribute to Nicholas Ridley, a 16th century English churchman who was martyred during the Protestant Reformation for refusing to renounce his Anglican faith.

Operation commenced in the fall of 1889 with 48 boarders on the school roll. The Ridley campus grew dramatically during the 1920's, and new buildings and facilities were added in each of the following decades. In 1973, the school became co-educational; just over a dozen girls enrolled in the inaugural year. Today half of the enrolled students are girls.

For more than a century Ridley College has been focused on enriching the learning experience for its students. The College has achieved a stellar reputation as one of the Country's leading educational institutions, which places a premium on learning, best practices in teaching - and the use of technology to enhance learning and teaching.

Today the college boasts more than 600 students and 75 teaching faculty members. As part of the school's four-year old TigerFACT (**F**lexible **A**ccess to **C**omputing **T**echnology) program, all teaching faculty and students have their own Apple Laptop computers. In addition, Ridley launched The Chandran Institute for Innovation in Education in the summer of 2000. Together, these initiatives demonstrate Ridley's profound commitment to providing the best possible learning environment for students and to build the best staff development program in the world. Behind the scenes, Ridley's FirstClass system (called "Pinnacle") reliably and seamlessly supports the free exchange of huge amounts of information and collaboration.

The Communications Challenge

Ten years ago, Ridley College empowered a committee with a mandate to look at available communications systems. The College had one main goal in mind - to enhance the overall communications and collaborative process among its students, teachers and the community.

There were three other major concerns that the committee identified as well. Firstly, the system had to provide faculty and students with a cost-effective, secure and easy to use system. Secondly, the new system would need to be able to let the College take control of its communications and have the flexibility to evolve with the College. Thirdly, it would have to allow faculty and students to collaborate via email, conferences, directories and calendars.

In 1993, FirstClass was the total solution that the systems committee recommended.

The FirstClass Solution: Day to Day Impact on the School

From a "school mastery" point of view there were a number of ways in which FirstClass immediately impacted the core business of the school. Firstly, it provided equal access to information and assignments for its students. Secondly, it enabled teachers to securely share valuable resources, to create assignments, best practices, problem solve, and decrease preparation time.

In terms of school outreach, FirstClass enabled the College to communicate easily with each of their student's parents in regards to their child's progress and learning milestones. From the student's point of view, FirstClass encouraged students to collaborate with each other and with teachers on homework, assignments, and projects.

From an "operational" standpoint, FirstClass boasted a lower total cost of ownership as compared to other known solutions as it required one server, and minimal hardware and personnel requirements. In addition, although Ridley College's core operating system is Macintosh, it does have a number of servers and desktop clients that are Windows-based. FirstClass's platform-independence means that all Ridley clients - students, faculty, support staff, and even parents can exchange information seamlessly.

"The next major step for us will be to find an all inclusive Student Information System. We have done extensive research into the SIS market, and we've kept a close eye on the Systems Interoperability Framework (SIF) consortium of software developers," said Stephen Clarke, EDNet director, Ridley College. "To-date, nobody has been able to build a complete information system that will handle all the needs of a boarding school. However, we know that FirstClass is the only communications solution available on the market today that is SIF compliant, and would enable our students and faculty to collaborate and communicate regardless of the device or operating system that they are using."

Recently, Ridley College purchased an additional 7,500 FirstClass Collaborative Groupware licenses in an aggressive campaign to maintain connectivity with its Alumni. Now the entire Ridley Community (students, parents, teachers, and Alumni) has access to email, permission-controlled conferences, directories, individual and group calendars, and online chats. According Mr. Clarke, Pinnacle users now have the ability to find out what is happening around the school, get the score on the latest football game, or even find out what is being served for dinner in The Great Hall that evening.

Ridley Unifies all of its Messaging with FirstClass Unified Communications

A year and a half year ago, Ridley College took steps to enhance the capabilities of its FirstClass system with the purchase of 120 FirstClass Unified Communications licenses from Centrinity. With the addition of FirstClass Unified Communications, members of the faculty now get their own personal mailbox which converges their email, voice and fax messages into one unified mailbox which can be accessed via the device of their choice - including telephone, cell phone, computer and handheld device. Regardless of a faculty member's location, they are now able to access important information with ease. No longer does location or device restrict them.

"We selected FirstClass because of its reliability, ease of use and cost. It also helped that it had the collaboration tools - such as conferences and directories - we needed to allow teachers to share valuable teaching resources and students to share learning resources," said Mr. Clarke. "The exciting 'value-add' of Unified Communications is that we can now access all of this regardless of the kind of device used."

Mr. Clarke added: "As part of our partnership with Centrinity, I'd like to spend this year seeing how we might extend the features of Unified Communications to the student body. Given that two-thirds of our students reside on campus from 35 different countries, it would be interesting to see how this could improve their ability to stay connected with their families back home. It could become yet another facet of this unique, exciting Ridley experience."

To experience the power of FirstClass, call 1.888.808.0388 to arrange for a demo.

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