Same Reliability, New Opportunities

Reaseheath College
www.reaseheath.ac.uk

UK College upgrades to IP Office™ Server Edition to increase capacity and benefit from new capabilities

Reaseheath College was reluctant to move away from its trusted Avaya IP Office™ 500 platform. But the transition to the new IP Office Server Edition platform proved notably non-disruptive. What's more, it has given the College a substantial boost in capacity and unified communications capabilities that promise new efficiencies and savings across its operations. While just as dependable and easy to manage as the old, the new solution now runs on a virtualized Hyper-V environment – ideal for disaster recovery, administration and mobility in a busy education setting.

Rob Brown was extremely happy with his telephony system. As head of technical services at one of the UK's leading land-based colleges, Brown and his small team are responsible for a vast range of IT solutions and services. While many of them caused him regular headaches, with complex configuration and regular maintenance updates, the Avaya IP Office™ 500 was the exception: "it was easy to configure, and incredibly reliable: it just sat there and did its job."

Challenges

- Replace a much-loved IP Office 500 solution with a higher capacity system

- Integrate with Microsoft Hyper-V

- Complete the transition in a live environment with no user disruption

Value Created

- Capacity more than quadrupled

- Hassle-free installation

- Minimal administrative effort

- Host of new opportunities for UC and mobility

- Ready for future growth

But Brown had a problem. Reaseheath College had grown rapidly – faster, in fact, than had been expected when the IP Office 500 had been purchased. Student numbers had soared, impressive new facilities added and the number of staff grew accordingly. His much-valued platform would have to be replaced by a larger one.

Perfect Timing

Brown contacted Evoke Telecom, the College's support partner, who confirmed that the natural successor from Avaya was IP Office™ Server Edition – which offered the same core capabilities and dependability, but with higher capacity and some additional features. However, Brown and his colleagues had a few complicating factors to consider. One was whether to move to a hosted model, rather than on-premise; another was that Reaseheath College had already opted to introduce Microsoft Hyper-V as its core IT platform – following the path that many other UK education providers have taken.

It was therefore hugely welcome news that the latest release of IP Office Server Edition, version 10.1, could be deployed on Hyper-V. "We would have moved to Server Edition anyway," Brown confirmed, "but the fact that we could run it on our chosen virtual software platform was a real plus."

As well as being compatible with the new virtual platform, IP Office Server Edition was also ready to work with the College's existing Avaya handsets. "That not only meant we wouldn't have to pay for new handsets," Brown explained, "it also meant we wouldn't have to retrain users." This in turn helped make an on-premise solution, retaining the existing handsets, a more cost-effective option for the College.

> ## "The reliability is top tier, without a doubt. On a day to day basis, we can almost forget about it – which is ideal for us."

– **Rob Brown,** Head of Technical Services, Reaseheath College

A Change that Nobody Noticed

Keeping the same handsets was one way of minimizing any potential disruption from the upgrade, but Brown was still acutely conscious of the risks of changing communications systems. "For us, being without a phone system for any length of time would be a killer." The upgrade was therefore meticulously planned to take place over a three-day period when the College was quieter – though still open. As well as introducing IP Office Server Edition, the transition also involved moving from the older ISDN 30 connections to SIP, to increase capacity and support greater convergence in the future.

"The new system was brought in alongside the old one, so there was no downtime at all. The changeover took place in a live environment and nobody outside the project team knew anything changed – which is exactly how it should be."

From the administration and management perspective too, the difference was small; the interfaces were familiar, so Brown's team were immediately confident and in control.

Embracing New Opportunities

But while the initial change was deliberately low-key, Brown is keen to explore the new features that IP Office Server Edition offers for users. "Once we've got all our major platform projects out of the way, we're looking forward to giving staff the option of mobile twinning and new conferencing capabilities," he confirmed.

As part of the decision-making process, Brown and his team went with Evoke to Avaya's demonstration suite at Tower 42 in London. There, Avaya showcased some of the additional opportunities that come as part of IP Office Server Edition, as well as its broader portfolio and strategic roadmap.

That helped enhance Brown's understanding of how Reaseheath College could apply the solution they now had. "We knew we were only using a fraction of IP Office's capabilities, but we hadn't fully identified how we could best capitalize on them. That session was invaluable."

As a result of it, Reaseheath College acquired 12 power user licenses that will allow his team and some of the senior management to test out further features, particularly around video and unified communications. "Video appears to be a key opportunity for distance learning," Brown noted.

He has also identified one particular user group that will benefit from the additional mobility that IP Office Server Edition offers: the team of Apprenticeship assessors, who regularly travel to industry sites to see the College's apprentices in action. "With IP Office Server Edition and Hyper-V, we can give them tools that will help them complete assessments and the related documentation while they're in the field. It will make their lives a lot easier: previously they'd have to return to campus."

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Still Extremely Happy

For now, though, these opportunities – which will save money as well as time – are for the future. The immediate requirement was a new telephony system and with IP Office Server Edition installed and working smoothly, Brown is just as happy with the new system as the previous one.

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Solutions & Products

- Avaya IP Office™ Server Edition

About Reaseheath College

Reaseheath College is one of the leading specialist land-based Colleges in the UK. Based in Cheshire, the College has an enviable setting amongst 330 hectares of farms, parklands, lake, woodland and sports facilities. It has 7,500 students from apprentices to higher education and 540 staff. Since 2016, Reaseheath College has been a University Centre of the University of Chester.

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