



INDUSTRY

Abingdon is a leading independent day and boarding school serving 1,050 boys who range from four to 18 years of age. Situated on a 35 acre site in the centre of Abingdon, just south of Oxford, the school combines the very best in academic standards, music, sport and the arts. It was founded by the Benedictine monks of Abingdon Abbey, and evidence for its existence dates back to the building of St. Nicolas's church as the first schoolroom, somewhere between 1121 and 1184. The character that makes Abingdon School so distinctive is a subtle synthesis of values, traditions, personalities, places, attitudes and activities. It became fully independent after the ending of the Direct Grant System in 1975 and has continued to grow ever since, merging with Abingdon Preparatory School in 1998 to form the Abingdon Foundation as it is today.

Secure communication is key - A solution for now and for the future

CHALLENGE

The welfare of the 1,000+ boys is of paramount importance to the academic and administrative staff at Abingdon School. Beyond the teaching side of their responsibility are the day to day issues which looking after a large number of full time boarders presents. One of these is to ensure that they are able to communicate with each other throughout the school, and with their parents and friends at home in a simple, yet safe and secure manner. Part of this requirement has been the development of a school-wide e-mail system which can be used not only by staff as part of their normal working day, but also by pupils.

David Haworth, Head of ICT for the school, explains further: "Having previously used an external company for our e-mail services, we had come to a point where we knew we needed more functionality. But on top of that, to ensure maximum security, flexibility and integration with our existing systems, we also wanted something in-house where we had hands-on control. It needed to be future proof and stable, as well as being a system that we could build the way we wanted it, not someone else's solution. I chose CommuniGate Pro because we had used an earlier version of the software in the past and we were sure it would do everything that we needed it to."

SOLUTION

In March 2007 David contacted GAP Internet Communications, who is CommuniGate Systems' distributor and business partner in the UK and Ireland. They supplied and implemented the system, which is an award-winning combined communication solution for e-mail, Instant Messaging and VoIP. CommuniGate Pro provides a full set of features but is also simple to administer, making it ideal for small to medium-sized organizations like Abingdon School. GAPIC also provided their own professional services to implement and test the system during the Summer holidays.

SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

Abingdon boarding schools takes pride in implementing the finest technology for their students. Their internet communications hardware is run on a MacPro tower with: two 2.66Ghz dual-core Intel Xeon processors running at 677MHz, with 8GB DDR2RAM and a 1.33Mhz system bus frequency.

Two 1GB network interface cards are present, with one being used solely for LAN access and maintenance, and one secure de-militarized card (same machine, separate from network) present for mail access. For their 1,000+ students, Abingdon has four 700GB Hard-drives set up across a RAID5 network array, providing a fast, and reliable user experience

BENEFITS

The CommuniGate Pro solution has now been up and running since that start of September 2007 and is performing well, providing tailored web-mail and Internet access for the boys, as well as web-mail and Outlook-based e-mail facilities for over 150 staff. It also gives David the ability to view detailed logs which give him a breakdown of all activity within the system. An added advantage is also an overall lower total cost of ownership, as the system needs far less hardware to run on, which in turn reduces maintenance and administrative costs.

To complete the solution, GAPIC also provided anti-Spam and anti-virus software, to ensure that the CommuniGate Pro solution is not only safe and secure for the boys to use, but is also protected from external threats. Although Abingdon School are only using the e-mail functionality at the moment, they also have the ability to add Voice over IP communications and fully-secure Instant Messaging at any time via a simple license key.

Mr. Haworth concludes, "CommuniGate Pro is now our only e-mail system and we have banned all other types of e-mail during the school day to encourage everyone to use the school solution. In terms of our opinion of the product itself, if you asked me for a score out of 10 I'd have to say 12 as it's very intuitive and easy to use. We had a half day hands on training session and after that it was very simple to operate. Spam filtering has always been a major headache for us, and the reason for many complaints with communication solutions we have used in the past. Our new solution with CommuniGate Pro is completely hands-off for users and is very effective indeed. The additional calendar management, IM and VoIP functionality were also a key part of our decision-making process when it comes to planning for the future. We intend to upgrade our phone system in about two years time and we want to integrate CommuniGate Pro into this project. We will also use the Instant Messaging as well, probably for IT support in the first instance. We are already sharing calendars and address books and many of the boys and staff are already using the web file-storage provided on the server to access their work at home too! We worked collaboratively with GAPIC throughout the whole project and kept in regular contact. They gave us lots of pointers on how to set it up in the right way and if there was anything they didn't know, they were always able to find out. They have been absolutely brilliant."



655 Redwood Hwy Suite 275
Mill Valley, CA 94941
T 800 262 4722
F 415 383 7461

www.communiGate.com

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