

College of the Canyons



Customer

College of the Canyons

Industry

Higher Education

Challenges

- Significant budget cuts
- Record enrollment growth
- Bottleneck call volume
- Antiquated technology
- Declining customer service

Solution

Contact-center solution: NEC's UC for Business (UCB)
NEC Dealer: Digital Telecommunications Corp. (Van Nuys, CA)

Results

- Dynamically allocated resources
- Fewer caller complaints
- Improved customer service
- Enhanced staff efficiency

Colleges and universities communicate with a number of audiences both on campus and within the community. The service they provide has a direct impact on the school's enrollment, reputation and advancement of overall institutional goals.

College of the Canyons is a community college in Santa Clarita, California. The school has a student population of more than 24,000. College of the Canyons implemented NEC's UC for Business (UCB) to improve efficiency and customer service in the midst of a budget shortage.

Challenges

California experienced its worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, creating a major budget shortfall for all state-funded organizations. The state's financial crisis created a double challenge for community colleges like the College of the Canyons. Not only did the school receive significantly less state funding compared to previous years, enrollment rates skyrocketed. "A lot of people who were out of work enrolled in community college to get additional training for their current career or for different career all together," says Robert Betancourt, Telecom Coordinator, College of the Canyons. "We had a lot more non-traditional college students enrolling, so the population was no longer just 18-20 years old."

The college staff became inundated as admission rates continued to grow. "We were getting more students than we would get reimbursed for even in a normal budget year," says Betancourt. "We just didn't have the funds or budget to hire more people to handle the influx."

Call volume into the campus also increased. "On an average day, our switchboard operators handle about 1,000 incoming calls," says Betancourt. "And these are not internal calls, they are all calls coming into our automated attendant." This number more than doubled during registration periods and special events.

Typically, incoming calls to the campus were answered by the school's auto attendant, which gave callers a list of departments from which to choose. The calls are routed from there. The automated attendant became increasingly difficult to navigate as call volume increased.

Challenges (cont.)

Customer service began to decline. “External callers as well as campus staff were frustrated with the long hold times,” adds Betancourt. “Callers who were tired of waiting on the phone would call back repeatedly or “zero” out with the hope of being helped faster.” This created bottlenecked call volume at the switchboard. “Switchboard operators became inundated,” says Betancourt. “Plus, they had no choice but to transfer callers right back to the department, so it was kind of a vicious cycle.”

College of the Canyons sought an alternative means of handling the challenge. “Our automated attendant system was antiquated and didn’t really serve our needs anymore,” says Betancourt. With resources for new technology purchases also tight, the school sought the most cost-effective way to improve customer service. “We needed a way to enhance what we have and allocate the resources we do have in the best manner,” adds Betancourt.

Solution

Betancourt contacted Digital Telecommunication Corporation (DTC), an authorized NEC dealer in Van Nuys. “I provided DTC engineers with the raw call data to analyze,” says Betancourt. “They immediately understood our situation.”

DTC recommended UCB, a unified communications application from NEC that includes robust features for contact-center and front-desk operations. “UCB would help College of the Canyons improve call handling and it could be loaded on a NEC voice server that the college was already using within its counseling and early education departments,” said Bob Bliss, President, DTC. “This would help the school alleviate the bottlenecked incoming call volume while leveraging their current resources.”

Betancourt went with the UCB solution. “DTC demonstrated the features of the UCB product and it proved to be the perfect solution to our challenges.”

College of the Canyons is leveraging UCB to improve service to callers. UCB’s announcement feature provides callers with status, wait times and progression of their call. “Telling callers why they are on hold and keeping them updated as time progresses ensures callers won’t hang up just as they reach the front of the queues,” says Betancourt. “Callers can also decide if they want to hold or call back, which improves customer satisfaction. The announcement feature also directs callers to resources also available on the school’s website.

Switchboard operators are reducing call-handling times with UCB. The solution enables the college to sync its phone directory with LDAP

and Outlook™. This, along with UCB’s click-to-dial feature, saves switchboard operators time from having to manually look up and dial a contact. What’s more, UCB allows operators to drag and drop a call to an extension while speaking to someone else, allowing them to help more than one caller at a time.

UCB also has presence, which provides switchboard operators with visibility into all departments. “Operators can make an informed decision to not put callers back in queue if they have already zeroed out,” says Betancourt. “Instead, they can maybe transfer the caller to someone else in the department who may not be qualified to handle the call, but can at least provide a live answer to take a message and have someone call them back.” UCB’s internal chat function also allows users to multi-task by communicating with more than one user at a time.

The presence feature also allows the school to use agents from other parts of the campus that aren’t quite as busy to help out when call volume gets high. “This way, we can dynamically allocate resources without having to hire new people or move people around,” Betancourt adds.

Results

College of the Canyons has improved service to callers by implementing the UCB solution. “UCB allows us to measure and track data like call length and hold times and identify peaks and valleys in call volume,” says Betancourt. “Now we can improve service to callers because know the areas in which we are most and least effective.”

UCB also enables better resource planning and management. “The biggest selling point for me was UCB’s ability to have agents from other parts of the campus to help out when call volume goes through the roof,” says Betancourt. “And since we can now identify peaks and valleys in call volumes, we can use the historic data to staff better or even pool staff from other departments that may be able to fill in.”

UCB is allowing the college to optimize existing resources. “With the budget situation here in California, doing more with less is our reality,” says Betancourt. “UCB is helping us solve some of our challenges and do things better utilizing what we have.”

Betancourt attributes the school’s partnership with DTC a major contributor to the UCB solution being a success. “We’ve had a really great partnership with DTC. They totally understood our situation and how tough it can be to explain to college decision makers the need for more resources in a recessionary environment. We appreciate DTC’s determination to stay the course with us. I couldn’t ask for a better partner,” Betancourt concludes.

The college plans to eventually expand the solution in the future to the business office as well as the computer-support department at the other campus.

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