



Mount Pleasant Area School District, PA

After nearly a year of struggling with its new telephone system, Mount Pleasant School District made the move to Mitel

Although the Mount Pleasant Area School

District in Pennsylvania enjoyed the benefits of a quality telephone system for over 12 years, replacement parts were becoming unavailable or hard to come by. So when the district—which consists of six facilities with over 250 handsets—decided to upgrade its obsolete system in the summer of 2012, its IT team estimated they would have time to work out any kinks before the fall semester began.

Customer Needs

- *Work with district's systems integrator to install a new phone system for the school district on the heels of a problematic installation of another manufacturer's equipment.*

Solution Components

- *Mitel and ASCC upgraded Mount Pleasant's analog and digital phones to IP with Mitel's IP communications platform.*



And while 90 percent of the installation was completed on time, little did they know that the kinks would turn into bigger problems that they'd still be working to resolve well into 2013.

The district's systems integrator, ASCC, had partnered with a leading telecommunications PBX provider to meet the school system's needs, but the fixes weren't coming. When ASCC's team offered to replace the problem system at their expense with a Mitel solution, the change-weary customer had to decide whether to continue working toward a resolution with the current system— or switch systems yet again.

Technology—and communication—gaps

The problems with Mount Pleasant's new phone system were extensive, ranging from disruptive communications to safety issues. But at the end of the day, it simply didn't perform as expected.

"There are some things that are unique to schools that we didn't really think would be difficult because most basic phone systems do them," says Mount Pleasant Director of Technology Bob Rizzo. "But for this system, they were a problem."

For example, with the new system, parents could use a dial-by-name directory, which sent calls directly to teachers in their classrooms.

"You don't want a teacher taking calls from parents during class. But those calls were going straight through, and we couldn't stop them," Rizzo says.

"We repeatedly asked for their assistance, and we couldn't figure out why they couldn't provide it."

Message lights on analog phones also weren't working properly. A light would come on, but the phone wouldn't ring, so calls between classrooms and between offices were often missed. Emergency alerts were also an issue.

Results

The Mitel system was successfully installed, eliminating issues that had been unresolved by the previous system and improving call quality and ease of use.

"When a teacher dials 9-1-1, you would expect that not only would the call go through, but that you would be able to alert the admin in that building that the call was just placed," says Bob Schleicher, Director of Hosted & Network Services at ASCC. "That could happen with their 12-year-old system just fine, but the new one couldn't handle it."

In addition to the technology issues, there was also an expectations disconnect on the part of the provider.

For example, hunt groups (groups of extensions that handle certain types of calls) not functioning with the new system was a hot-button issue for the administrative offices. Missed calls at the front desk were supposed to roll over to another group for them to answer, and then to voicemail if they weren't available. But the provider had difficulty not only in getting this and other basic issues resolved, but also in understanding why they were a problem.

"Some of these things, the system manufacturer didn't recognize as being an issue," says Joe Hesske, VP of Hosted, Network & Pro-A/V Solutions for ASCC. "And as a partner and reseller of that product, we really never felt like we were getting the engineering support that was necessary. We repeatedly asked for their assistance, and we couldn't figure out why they couldn't provide it."

At A Crossroads

To their credit, the Manufacture presented workarounds for some of the issues. But ASCC (and Mount Pleasant) weren't satisfied. "The workarounds were ugly and cumbersome for the end user, and it just wasn't something that we felt comfortable saying, 'Well, if you do all these things and press all these buttons, you can kind of get it to work.' It was embarrassing," Hesske says.

But the prospect of making yet another switch in less than a year was also daunting. So when ASCC presented Mount Pleasant with the idea of switching to Mitel, they naturally expected some hesitation.

"That's a big decision for a customer," Hesske says. "Do I want to ride this out, or do I want to completely yank everything out and take the chance of putting in something else that may not be any better? Can we endure the trauma again?"

"We wanted something that could be one solution and not a combination of a number of different solutions. And Mitel was able to put that on the table for us."

But just minutes after meeting with Mitel, Mount Pleasant decided to make the switch.

"It came down to the fact that no matter what was happening with the other manufacturer, everything that was being offered was a patch, a workaround," says Terry Struble, Mount Pleasant's superintendent at the time. "We wanted something that could be one solution and not a combination of a number of different solutions. And Mitel was able to put that on the table for us."

Solution:

ASCC upgraded Mount Pleasant's analog and digital phones to IP with Mitel's IP communications platform.

"Previously, Mount Pleasant had digital phones in the offices and analog phones in the classrooms, but to show them that we were doing everything possible to satisfy them and get the system working, we upgraded the digital to fully IP at our own expense, and Mitel worked with us to make it possible," Schleicher says.

Where there were once five independently operating systems communicating with one another, the school system is now operating on one platform, which functions as the server for the entire district, as well as providing backup redundancy (or failover) to the other facilities throughout the district.

Results:

Mount Pleasant's migration to Mitel began in mid-May and was completed at the end of June.

"We were ready to cut over after the first day, but didn't want to until we were fully trained," Rizzo says. "We actually still cut over a day early, because Mitel had everything ready to go."

And the district's staff was surprised by the immediate improvement in call quality.

"It was a big, noticeable difference. They were calling it 'HD sound,'" Schleicher says. "And they never spent any time without phones. The staff appreciated that."

Both Mount Pleasant and the ASCC team attribute the quick and painless installation to the support they received from Mitel.

"Mitel was much stronger on both dealer and end-user support than the previous telecom vendor," Schleicher says. "And Mitel is continuing to support us intensely with other installations that we're working on. We see this as a great partnership."

Next Steps:

In July, Struble became the superintendent for Clearfield Area School District and was pleased to be able to complete the successful phone system installation before his departure from Mount Pleasant. Now, he's looking ahead to the possibilities at Clearfield.

"I've already talked to Bob Schleicher about working on our system here because it doesn't do what I believe it should be able to do," Struble says. "Because now I know what a phone system can do, and that's what I want to have. So, we'll probably be looking at Mitel as a solution for Clearfield someday."