Success Story

Clark Atlanta University improves organizational communications and cuts support costs by 50 percent

The Task
• Replace a legacy PBX to deliver improved communications capabilities and enhanced call handling capacity at a reduced cost.
• Implement a unified communications solution that would transform working for staff, deliver improved call management abilities, and support a new collaboration platform for staff and students.
• Instigate a smart new approach to communications that enables the university to evolve its communications infrastructure to keep up with emerging communication demands within strict budgetary constraints.
• Deliver a communications solution that could effectively and cost-efficiently deliver all the capacity and flexibility the university needs today and into the future.

The Solution
• OpenScape UC Server.
• OpenScape Voice.
• OpenScape UC Application.
• OpenScape Contact Center.

The Benefits
• Delivered new convenience and capabilities to students, faculty, and staff, including caller ID and more responsive call centers.
• Projected annual savings of 50 percent on service contracts.
• Projected 10 percent increase in customer satisfaction from the call center.
• Moved from limited, inflexible infrastructure to flexible, open standards from Siemens Enterprise Communications.

Clark Atlanta University Opens New Communications Channels for Students and Parents with Siemens Enterprise Communications - now Unify - and Black Box Expertise.
The Challenge
Clark Atlanta University’s (CAU) mission is to prepare a diverse community of learners to excel in their chosen endeavors and to become responsible, productive, and innovative citizen leaders, locally and globally. The origins of the university — Clark College, the first private liberal arts school in the country for African Americans, and Atlanta University, the nation’s oldest graduate institution — date back to Reconstruction. Today, the University, which in 1988 consolidated Clark College and Atlanta University on a single campus in the heart of Atlanta, offers 38 undergraduate, graduate, doctoral degree and specialist programs and develops socially, globally responsible leaders.

By 2009, however, CAU realized its aged and inflexible telecommunications system had failed to keep pace with larger technological changes. The system’s limitations reached a critical point in 2010, when parents inquiring about changes in federal financial aid policies flooded the school with nearly three times the normal call volume and overwhelmed the system. At that point, CAU’s new Associate Vice President and CIO Reggie Brinson hadn’t been on the job a year. “We couldn’t see all the calls that were coming in,” he recalls. “This was unacceptable.” CAU then tasked him with finding an adequate solution that would significantly reduce costs while providing improved functionality and expanded capability. The incident only served to underscore larger, ongoing communications challenges that needed to be addressed, including:

- The legacy PBX had reached end of life and would not allow CAU to fully exploit the voice over IP capability of the switch; an upgrade would have required investing in a new server and software.
- CAU’s annual contract with its long-term service provider was costly and about to expire, leading it to reconsider its entire approach to their communication systems and contracts.
- CAU wanted a flexible unified communications system that could easily manage the university’s extensive network and volume of phones and integrate faxes, SMS, and voice messaging communications, especially with fluctuating call volumes during the registration period.
- Budget constraints, coupled with increased communication demands, necessitated taking a smarter, longer-term approach to technology.

The Solution
From the time Brinson arrived at CAU, he knew that the school’s communications capabilities were rapidly becoming obsolete. Working closely with Phyllis McCrary, Manager of Telecommunications, he proposed moving CAU to a campus-wide IP unified communications system that would move the school to IP phones, improve call center capability, and allow the phasing out of many analog phones.

CAU looked at several solutions but ultimately chose a carrier-grade, open, native SIP-based unified communications application from Siemens Enterprise Communications, including OpenScape Voice Application and OpenScape Contact Center running on the OpenScape UC Server. Since the OpenScape solution uses open standards, CAU envisions integrating their communications system with their new Microsoft Live@edu student email system and SharePoint collaboration platform for faculty and staff.

To advise the University and implement the system, CAU chose Black Box Network Services. “We were looking to acquire a solution we could depend upon in terms of its longevity and fit, and looking progressively at where the capabilities would go forth,” Brinson says. “We didn’t want to repeat the past.”
The Benefits
The move to OpenScape Voice running on Siemens Enterprise Communications OpenScape UC Server eliminated the shortcomings associated with simply extending CAU’s legacy telecommunications platform and delivered new capabilities to meet the future needs of the University.

Some of the most notable benefits include:

- **50 percent reduction in ongoing support costs**
  CAU was locked into a costly contract with a company whose solution would not provide the full capabilities CAU demanded and was near its end-of-life. By switching to Siemens Enterprise Communications OpenScape solution and Black Box consulting services, CAU eliminated expenses related to forced, “Band-Aid” type fixes and add-ons.

- **Delivered new capabilities and convenience to students, faculty, and staff**
  Users can take advantage of integrated IP phone, voice messaging, and SMS communications anywhere on campus—truly providing mobile capability; gained caller ID and an expanded call center feature set to more efficiently handle inbound calls.

- **Acquired a responsive and visionary support partner**
  CAU was able to move from an unsatisfactory support relationship to one that “not only met our current business requirements but could help us with what we should be looking at going forward.”

- **Minimized disruption by adopting a phased approach to implementation**
  CAU needed a solution that was flexible enough to accommodate continued use of analog phones for an unspecified period of time.

- **Customer experience impact**
  With Siemens’ open, standards-based OpenScape UC solution and the security of ongoing support from Black Box, CAU was able to immediately give users a greater array of options and services, reducing frustration and call wait times. Additional flexibility, scalability, and features of OpenScape ensure that the University can plan for, and keep pace with emerging communications trends to meet the future needs of the faculty, students, and extended CAU family.

Dr. Carlton Brown, President, Clark Atlanta University, reviews the benefits to date: “Siemens Enterprise Communications and Black Box offered an innovative and forward-looking solution and service set to take our University forward. Even more, this partnership—literally launched the same week as the University’s new strategic plan—becomes a very real, pivotal component of CAU’s overall advancement strategy. One of our strategic priorities is to increase institutional capacity and fortify our infrastructure. The new Siemens/Black Box platform squarely meets that objective. We haven’t just leveled our telecommunications playing field. We have raised our position on it.”
About Unify

Unify—formerly known as Siemens Enterprise Communications—is one of the world’s largest communications software and services firms. Our solutions unify multiple networks, devices and applications into one easy-to-use platform that allows teams to engage in rich and meaningful conversations. The result is a transformation of how the enterprise communicates and collaborates that amplifies collective effort, energizes the business, and dramatically improves business performance. Born out of the engineering DNA of Siemens, Unify builds on this heritage of product reliability, innovation, open standards and security to provide integrated communications solutions for 75% of the Global 500. Unify is a joint venture of the Gores Group and Siemens AG.

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