

A CASE STUDY IN EDUCATION

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES DIGITAL CONVERGENCE WITH UDT'S ENHANCEMENTS



THE PROBLEM

Christopher Columbus High School had computer labs and Internet access. But the system wasn't always reliable. Sometimes it would crash unexpectedly, leaving teachers like Irene Culmo in a bind. "If I walked into my classroom and the system was down, I still had to teach computer science," recalled Culmo, chair of the school's computer science department. "The analogy would be, 'I'm going to teach students to play the piano, and we don't have a piano.'" That was in the computer labs, where Culmo tries to keep her students on the cutting edge of technology. But outside of her arena, the situation was even more challenging.

In an age of DVDs and other digital devices, teachers from other disciplines were still using VCRs and overhead projectors. When they needed computers for a lesson, the equipment wasn't available. Students had to wait until they got to the computer lab. And if you were a student working at the school's TV production studio, the conditions weren't much better. The production board was old and out-dated. Students worked with VHS tapes. The space was cramped, and news reported from the studio on Christopher Columbus News Network (CCNN) was very parochial.

For a generation of students born in the Information Age, and for educators committed to academic excellence, it just wasn't enough. Students wanted more. Teachers wanted better. And administrators decided it was time for a change.

So they turned to trusted experts at Florida's leading information technology company – United Data Technologies (UDT).

THE UDT SOLUTION

During the 2004-2005 school year, the school administration formed a technology committee to determine how the school could optimize the technology and multi-media available. Members of the committee looked at curriculum integration, professional development and infrastructure. They called for a Smart Board in every classroom to enhance classroom instruction, and they proposed that the school build a new technology center on campus.

UDT had already built a solid reputation at the school, providing technical support for the school's existing technology needs. So administrators asked the company to bid on the project and to offer some possible solutions to the problem. UDT answered all of the school's questions satisfactorily, and school administrators were pleased with reports from other schools about what a great job the company had done upgrading their programs. So UDT was hired for the job, and began transforming the school into a multi-media complex.

UDT offered a solution to the big picture, helping the school combine existing and new technology throughout the whole development of the Mas Technology Complex. The company installed Smart Boards, LCD projectors and personal computers in every classroom. And at the complex, UDT developed five computer labs with 168 flat LCD monitors and a large multi-purpose wireless classroom with 30 wireless notebooks. The company transformed the library into a college-level, digital oasis of information with the wireless notebooks and e-books. And the school went from 3 servers to 19, 14 of them virtual.

Furthermore, the production studio, also located in the new technology center, is no longer cramped and antiquated. UDT installed a computerized Tricaster production board that is now the brain of the operation. The studio also has three Sony HDV high definition cameras, a tele-prompter, sound board, Prodigy FX DJ Mixing station and a Croma Key Background. And it's all digital. Wherever needed, UDT customized the job to meet the needs of the client, even in areas that didn't fall under the company's job description. What mattered most was customer satisfaction, and getting the job done right.

RESULTS

School is now a place of discovery and intrigue for the students at Columbus High School. They don't have to look at Cable Television to know what's happening in the world around them. Their fellow students bring the news straight to their classrooms via the new high-tech television production studio, which allows students to report national and international news from the Internet. The show can be seen on computers in every classroom.

During instruction time, the classroom is just as exciting. Smart Boards allow teachers to integrate PowerPoint and the Internet into the lesson plans. Messy chalk boards, computer crashes and student boredom are things of the past. And students don't have to "power-down" when they enter the classroom because the technology at the school is cutting edge– and not just in the computer labs, but every classroom.

Even going to the library is more pleasurable, with access to wireless notebooks and e-books for research and the students' reading pleasure. School is the stimulating environment it ought to be for students and teachers alike. And Christopher Columbus was recently chosen as a "Smart Showcase School" for being a leader in the adoption and integration of technology to enhance teaching and learning.

"The transformation is almost like going from the stone age to the rocket age," said Irene Culmo, the computer science administrator. "The computer system, the network, the Internet, are always up and running, which when you're in an educational environment is obviously critical."