

VERTEKS CONNECTION



VOLUME 8 NUMBER 4

Mission Accomplished



Verteks supports Rocky Bayou Christian School's goal of providing more effective communication for parents.

Rocky Bayou Christian School takes seriously its commitment to parents, as well as students. Superintendent Michael Mosley notes that "the health of a school depends on the health of its culture — a culture comprised in part of intangibles often so subtle that the absence of their important influences may be overlooked." One of those intangibles is communication.

Dr. Mosley and the Rocky Bayou staff were concerned that the school's aging phone system was hindering effective communication with parents. Located in Niceville, Fla., Rocky Bayou Christian School has grown from 22 students in 1973 to more than 700 students today. The old PBX had not kept pace with that growth.

"We had a limited number of incoming lines so parents would frequently get a busy signal when they

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Mission Accomplished

called in. Parents also had a hard time getting to the department they wanted because of the way calls were routed,” said Beth Herndon, IT Manager, Rocky Bayou Christian School. “We were also worried that our old voice mail server was going to fail. It had to be restarted frequently and we were never sure that it would come back up. We knew it was time to get a new phone system.”

Rocky Bayou Christian School looked at several phone systems but was most impressed with the ShoreTel IP Communications system. Verteks Consulting demonstrated the system, and the school was equally impressed with the professionalism of the Verteks team.

“Everyone at Verteks was helpful and friendly, and our sales rep was really on the ball,” Herndon said. “That was an important factor in our decision to go with ShoreTel.”

Ease of Use, Advanced Features

The ShoreTel IP Communications system brings a number of advantages to Rocky Bayou Christian School. Traditional PBXs are notoriously difficult to administer and maintain, typically requiring a specialist technician for even the simplest moves, adds and changes. With ShoreTel, Herndon can perform most administrative functions from an easy-to-use, web-based interface.

“As IT manager, I love the way that I can use the ShoreTel Director to change somebody’s name on an extension. Plus, we can pick up a user’s phone and move it to a different office while keeping the same extension number. It makes my life a lot of easier,” she said.

The ShoreTel system also provides faculty and staff with a number of advanced communications features.

“Call forwarding is especially helpful — we can now send our calls to our cell phones when we are out of the office,” Herndon said. “We also have several people who will be using the conference calling function.”

Verteks made it easy for Rocky Bayou Christian School to take advantages of these features. The Verteks team worked closely with the school to design a solution that would meet its current and future needs and completed the implementation on schedule and with minimal disruption. Faculty and staff had plenty of time to become familiar with the new phone system before the start of the school year.

“They are very knowledgeable, and the project went off as planned,” said Herndon. “We ran into a few glitches but that’s just the way it is with computers. Verteks has always been on top of everything.”



“We exist as a school to serve parents, so to make such a quantum leap in our ability to communicate in a state-of-the-art, integrated technology environment is very exciting.”

— MICHAEL MOSLEY,
Superintendent
Rocky Bayou Christian School

Peace of Mind

Of course, the primary benefit of the new phone system is the improved communications it provides for parents. The ShoreTel solution enables Rocky Bayou Christian School to route the calls efficiently so that parents don’t get busy signals or always get sent to voice mail.

Having a reliable, efficient and flexible phone system also brings peace of mind.

“There’s a real sense of security that comes from having a system that works when we need it,” said Herndon. “We are also able to use the system to send emergency messages to rooms that don’t have intercoms. If there’s a tornado or some other situation we can send that message over the phones.”

Verteks brings peace of mind through its ongoing, expert support of the ShoreTel IP Communications system. Through its emphasis on long-term relationships, Verteks has become part of the school’s mission and culture by helping to ensure effective communications.

“We at Rocky Bayou Christian School are very thankful for the increased capacity and efficiency for successful parent communications made possible through Verteks,” said Mosley. “We exist as a school to serve parents, so to make such a quantum leap in our ability to communicate in a state-of-the-art, integrated technology environment is very exciting.”

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Editorial Correspondence:

7360 East 38th Street,

Tulsa, OK 74145

800.726.7667 • Fax 918.270.7134

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News Briefs

SMBs Buying More Tablets, Fewer Laptops

The tablet PC is increasingly the computing device of choice among employees of U.S. small to midsize businesses (SMBs), leading the market segment to purchase fewer laptops and desktop computers, according to a new survey of more than 400 SMBs conducted by the wireless and mobile market strategy firm iGR.

Employees at approximately 52 percent of U.S. SMBs currently own and use tablet devices, according to the survey. In addition, 24 percent of SMBs surveyed say they supply tablet devices to employees as part of an official corporate policy, and 26 percent indicated that their company would be buying fewer or far fewer laptops as a result of their tablet purchases in 2012.

BYOD Policies Must Address Legal Risks

Organizations adopting formal "Bring Your Own Device" policies that permit employees to use personal mobile devices to create, store and transmit work-related data must be prepared to deal with a number of potential legal risks, according to a recent article in the New York Law Journal.

Author Philip M. Berkowitz notes that organizations must be aware that legal requirements concerning security, encryption and confidentiality could be breached by BYOD use. Litigation discovery can also become more complex when material must be obtained from a device that is used both for personal and work matters.

Organizations must also be aware of the risk that contingent or contract workers could have confidential or trade secret data from a previous employer on their mobile devices. This issue should be addressed in contracts with agencies providing contract workers. Such contracts often are form agreements that may ignore these issues.

Hacking Toolkits Targeting Java

Developers of web exploit toolkits are increasingly focusing on Java exploits, network security experts say. Security bloggers have recently noted that one such kit, Blackhole, was recently upgraded to exploit a newly patched security flaw addressed in the Java SE 6 Update 33 and Java SE 7 Update 5.

The Blackhole platform has become increasingly popular among hackers. AVG research indicates that more than percent of all attacks are performed by variants of Blackhole.



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SOX Turns 10

Despite controversy, financial regulations lay groundwork for significant IT governance and automation improvements.

Born out of the collapse of Enron, WorldCom and Tyco, the Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) Act is now 10 years old. Designed to enhance the reliability of financial reporting and to improve audit quality, SOX compliance has moved beyond being just a regulatory obligation. Today it is viewed as part of a larger governance, risk management and compliance (GRC) program that is closely integrated with strategic decision-making, aligned with business goals and enabled by technology.

“The SOX Act set in motion a flurry of regulatory activity geared toward building more-responsible businesses and protecting stakeholders. Since then, several major regulations have been introduced in the U.S.,” said Michael Rasmussen, president of GRC advisory firm Corporate Integrity. “SOX compliance initiatives are now being seamlessly integrated with other crucial GRC processes such as policy management, enterprise risk management and internal audits.”

GRC provides a framework that allows organizations to strike an appropriate balance between business reward and risk. When applied specifically to IT, effective GRC programs deliver quantifiable business benefits by improving data protection, regulatory compliance and IT service levels. A study by the IT Policy Compliance group found that organizations with mature GRC programs increase revenues by 17 percent, profits by 14 percent and customer satisfaction by 18 percent — while also reducing financial losses from the theft or loss of customer data by 96 percent.

‘Embedding Accountability’

“Fundamentally, IT GRC is concerned with two objectives: delivering value to the business and mitigating business risks from IT,” said Everett Johnson, chairman of the Strategy Advisory Council at ISACA. “Successful organizations accomplish these goals by aligning the business and IT strategy, and embedding accountability for effective IT into the organization, beginning with top leadership.”

Given the GRC benefits that have grown from SOX compliance, many organizations surveyed by Pricewaterhouse

Coopers (PwC) claimed that even if Sarbanes-Oxley disappeared they would continue to pursue its requirements. For these organizations, the reason for implementing robust policies and controls is not just to pass regulatory compliance exams or audits, but to establish an enterprise-wide culture of accountability, transparency and risk-resilience.

Two out of three respondents to the PwC survey said SOX and other compliance initiatives helped their organizations uncover control problems, and 65 percent said SOX has helped them better understand their own business. In some cases, according to the PwC report, companies’ compliance efforts “are revealing weaknesses in controls and business processes, and accelerating their efforts to remediate these problems through control optimization, process improvement and automation.” By reworking existing, subpar controls, some organizations reported improving their use of valuable data and resources. In addition, 20 percent of respondents say complying with Sarbanes-Oxley has helped them reduce fraud.

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Skeptics Remain

Since SOX was enacted on July 30, 2002, with an overwhelming majority in both houses of Congress, reactions to it have been varied. Critics say it has imposed an unnecessary cost burden on companies regulated by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Proponents, meanwhile, say business accountability and transparency have increased while internal controls have become stronger — especially with CEOs and CFOs taking individual responsibility to certify and approve their regulatory filings.

According to a majority of executives surveyed by the consulting firm Protiviti, corporations’ internal control over financial reporting has improved “significantly” or “moderately” in the 10 years since SOX became law.

“Sarbanes-Oxley has had its share of controversy in the past, but nearly 70 percent of respondents in our survey reported that the internal control over financial reporting structure in their organizations has improved since compliance with Sarbanes-Oxley Section 404 became a require-

ment,” said Brian Christensen, Protiviti’s executive vice president, global internal audit. “Companies are still learning and working to improve continuously the quality of their internal controls as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of their compliance processes, even 10 years later.”

Automating Processes

These efforts to improve SOX compliance have contributed to another unexpected benefit — IT automation. The Act’s focus on internal controls has forced IT departments to think strategically and modernize their controls and processes. The majority of those surveyed by Protiviti said they are now focused on automating SOX compliance processes. Organizations are fast replacing spreadsheets and other cumbersome manual tools with innovative technology for automating controls and continuous control monitoring.

“Automating key controls likely represents the ‘final frontier’ in terms of significant Sarbanes-Oxley process improvement and cost savings,” said Jim DeLoach, Protiviti’s senior SOX practice leader.

Process automation has led to better management of risk intelligence, and has helped organizations integrate their “Big Data” stores with business applications, security systems and IT infrastructure. With this foundation, organizations now are also integrating data from mobile devices, cloud applications, and social media, and mapping it to enterprise risks and compliance requirements.

“In the initial years of SOX, it was challenging for companies to comply with the stringent requirements for controls, audits and monitoring,” said Keri Dawson, vice president of GRC solutions provider MetricStream. “But over the years, they have learned how to not only optimize SOX compliance but also harmonize controls across regulations, integrate SOX with their extended GRC programs, and improve reporting and visibility into compliance for senior management. More importantly, they have started embedding SOX controls into business processes so that compliance is made more efficient, while the business grows stronger and more risk-resilient.”

SARBANES-OXLEY

10 Years Later

Changes in Internal Controls

69%

Improved

Although companies are still learning and working to continuously improve the quality of their internal controls and the effectiveness of their compliance processes, 31 percent say their internal controls are “significantly” improved, and 38 percent say they are “moderately” improved.

PLANS TO AUTOMATE

17%

No plans to automate further

37%

Minimal plans to automate selected IT process and controls

34%

Moderate plans to automate numerous IT processes and controls

12%

Significant plans to automate a broad range of IT processes and controls

VALUE AND BENEFITS

44%

Enhanced understanding of control design operating effectiveness

43%

Internal audit is able to perform more traditional audits

42%

Increased effectiveness and efficiency of operations

35%

Increased reliance by external auditors on work of internal audit

32%

Reduced Section 404 (b) and Section 302 compliance costs

31%

Ability to better identify duplicate and superfluous controls

14%

No benefit - simply complying with required SEC rules

Companies, regardless of size or year of compliance, plan to hold steady with their projected Sarbanes-Oxley compliance spend for the upcoming fiscal year - a possible indicator that organizations believe they have the compliance process well-managed and under control

Source: Protiviti’s “2012 Sarbanes-Oxley Compliance Survey,” available at www.protiviti.com/SOXsurvey. Close to 800 respondents participated in the survey, which was conducted online in the fourth quarter of 2011 and the first quarter of 2012.

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Flirting *with* Change



Many organizations are falling head over heels for thin-client and zero-client computing. Is it a match for your environment?

Thin, uncomplicated, reliable and secure. Suitable for long-term relationship.

Sure, that could describe a personals ad on craigslist. But it is also a fairly accurate representation of thin-client computing. A recent Thin Client Vendor Landscape report, published by Info-Tech Research Group, predicts thin clients will continue to entice enterprises away from traditional desktops because of their security and cost benefits. Thin clients are less expensive, are more reliable and generally require less power than PCs.

“Going thin is about more than saving on electricity bills — the projected benefits go well beyond that. But cost is one benefit businesses are unlikely to ignore,” said Laura Hansen-Kohls, senior research analyst for Info-Tech Research Group.

Thin clients are the ideal partners for desktop virtualization solutions, in which the desktop environment, applications and data reside on a centralized server. A thin client has its own memory, processor and network connectivity but no hard drive — or any of the baggage that goes with it. IT is freed from the tasks of patching operating systems, installing and updating applications, and ensuring that data is protect-

ed on each and every desktop. And as they face the prospect of upgrading to Windows 7 and/or Windows 8, more organizations may embrace the thin-client alternative.

However, there is a fresh face in town that is attracting a lot of attention. So-called zero-client or ultra-thin-client solutions take thin-client computing to the next level. Which will win the hearts of desktop administrators?

A Lot of Experience

Thin clients have been around for a while. In fact, the thin-client computing concept grew out of the old mainframe environment, in which “dumb terminals” provided the interface to centralized applications. And “interface” pretty much describes a thin client’s function. In essence, a thin client accepts the user’s keystrokes and mouse movements and sends them to the application, then accepts the application’s video output and displays it for the user.

Thin clients began seeing renewed interest as relief for the high cost of PC management and support, but their mainframe legacy tarnished their reputation somewhat. Critics saw them as character-oriented devices unsuited to today’s graphics-intensive environment. It takes more processing

power and bandwidth to process graphics, and more still to handle multimedia, offsetting some of the benefits of thin-client computing.

However, thin clients have continued to evolve along with the marketplace. The leading manufacturers of thin-client solutions offer an array of options suited to a variety of end-user and application requirements. Some support Windows and Linux operating systems as well as specialized “thin” OSs. The most powerful provide support for voice, video and rich media, multiple displays, wireless connectivity, and more. These solutions provide a robust end-user experience while enabling organizations to capitalize on desktop virtualization.

Low Maintenance

Of course, not every end-user needs those kinds of features. If the key is to minimize desktop acquisition and administration costs, it’s important to select the simplest device for each application. And with no memory, processor or operating system, the zero client is about as uncomplicated as it gets.

The zero client is essentially a connectivity device optimized for the desktop virtualization environment. Zero-client solutions include software that runs inside each user’s virtualized desktop and routes data to and from a zero-client device, which typically includes an Ethernet jack, a VGA plug, audio input and output connections and USB connectors for input devices. Direct connectivity between the zero client and the host software eliminates the need for network protocols that can increase network overhead and degrade performance.

Zero clients offer all of the benefits of thin clients, with a lower cost per unit. What’s more, zero clients consume much less power than their thin client and PC counterparts — some as little as three watts.

Neither thin clients nor zero clients are right for everyone. They’re not sufficient for power users who need to do a lot of local processing with applications, for example. But for many organizations seeking to control costs, improve security, reduce energy consumption and streamline desktop management, thin-client and zero-client computing is a match made in heaven.

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