

CUSTOMER

Centralia College

A photograph of a modern, multi-story college building with large glass windows and a flat roof. The building is surrounded by trees and a clear blue sky. The image is used as a background for the title and subtitle text.

Ednetics Helps College Streamline Emergency Notification System, Install Virtual Desktops

Centralia College protects against natural disasters, active shooters; embarks on new-technology implementation pilot to stretch budget, while delivering a highly functional computer network

Summary

Led by its young IT director, Centralia College in the state of Washington has been able to make some very smart, efficient technology upgrades that are making the campus safer—and saving the IT department significant time and money. Working closely with Ednetics, the IT department upgraded its emergency notification system so that students, faculty, and staff could receive alerts via phone, email, text, SMS—even via on-campus loudspeakers and signage. Then it began a pilot project to install a virtual desktop infrastructure that gives students, faculty, and staff the freedom to work from anywhere, and saves the college money on equipment, energy, and staffing costs.

Centralia College, located about two hours south of Seattle, is the oldest continuously operating community college in the state of Washington. Each year, approximately 5,000 students come through its doors to attend classes and earn degrees. Popular degrees include Bachelor of Applied Science degrees in business management, information technology and application development, teacher education, and diesel technology. About five years ago, Sam Small took over as the director of IT, after having started at the school as a software engineer and later becoming a tenured technology professor. His first project as IT director, as well as his most recent, was with Ednetics.

“Ednetics is very good at working with higher education and government agencies because it knows about everything from budget concerns to buying cycles. They also work with the major players in the market. They are expert negotiators and have been able to keep prices low for us, which is really key for organizations like ours that have to find ways to stretch our budget.”

– Sam Small, IT Director
Centralia College



Centralia College, Centralia Washington

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**– Sam Small, IT Director
Centralia College**

Making A Campus Safer for Less

“When I was still a software engineer, we formed a relationship with Ednetics for our internet replacement project,” Small says. “We moved from a copper analog line system to a fully digital line system. Once I assumed the director role, I approached Ednetics about the possibility of upgrading our outdated mass-notification system. This is singly the most important project we’ve worked on, not only because it saved us a lot of money, but that it enabled us to instantly notify every single person associated with the college in the event of a natural disaster or active shooter.”

Ednetics’ role in the project was to serve as an intermediary between Small’s team and one of Ednetics’ vendors, Singlewire. Working together, the three organizations were able to replace the college’s previous four-vendor notification process with one integrated system. The system enables the school to send alerts via phone, email, text, SMS, and social media. The message can also be simultaneously distributed via campus loudspeakers and signage. The system can even lock specific doors across the campus. The success of the mass-notification project led to a second campus-wide project.

Upgrading the Campus Network, and Saving Money Doing it

“I talked to Ednetics about virtualizing our computer infrastructure and asked if they supported that kind of work,” Small remembers. “I found out very quickly that Ednetics is a full Cisco shop and that they worked with one of the main virtualization providers, VMWare.”

The first thing Small asked Ednetics was whether they thought the project was feasible, given the school’s staffing and budget. He then wanted to know what level of support he could expect from Ednetics, and what value the school would gain by having Ednetics serve as an intermediary to the three main vendors involved in the project: Cisco, NetApp, and VMWare. Everything Small heard from Ednetics convinced him to proceed with a pilot project to see if the technology could change the face of computing on the campus.

The virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) pilot project was important to the college for many reasons. First, it offered Centralia College an opportunity to see if it could actually improve computer access while simultaneously lowering costs. The big win would be if the college could replace its traditional, expensive, fully functional computers with “zero clients,” inexpensive computers that would serve as monitors to provide access to applications stored on main campus servers. Further savings could come from reduced energy costs. Zero clients use one tenth of the energy of regular laptop computers, and generate much less heat—an important consideration in large classes and computer labs. If the pilot is successful one of the biggest benefits will be that the virtual desktops can be managed remotely from a central administrative console. Small says this one capability will enable him to provide the campus with a lot more services—even with his small team.

“One of the really cool features of VDI is that it provides great mobile portability,” says Small. “If a student, faculty member, or staff goes off campus, all they have to do is log into the VDI environment. Once they’re in, they can work as if they were sitting at their desks. So, not only can we administer our desktops remotely, but our users can be remote and have the same computer experiences they’d have if they were sitting in their classroom or office.”

A Successful Pilot Paves the Way for a Transformed Computing Environment

All the promised benefits of virtual desktop infrastructure became real once the IT department and Ednetics completed the first phase of the VDI rollout, virtualizing 150 campus computers and installing 60 zero clients. The team also implemented a 10G fiber network to connect five buildings on campus, and tested the infrastructure on a remote campus 60 miles away. It even tested VDI connectivity over the 5mps DSL found in adjacent rural areas. Remarkably, it took just six months to go from Small's initial inquiry to Ednetics about VDI to completion of the first phase. The college anticipates going live with full campus deployment by fall 2019.

More Than Just Another Technology Vendor

Small says he worked closely with Ednetics from the beginning of the VDI sales and discovery process all the way to post-delivery maintenance.

"Most recently," he says, "we worked with the Ednetics project management team to make sure another project we were working on without them stayed on task, and that the project scope we had agreed on with the vendor was fulfilled."

He notes that many state agencies have the luxury of being able to hire people to manage a single job. "Our team is not like that. One of the base benefits of working with Ednetics for our team is that we have access to the size and skills of Ednetics, which is all just a phone call away. We don't have to hire another person to get access to the skills we need."

Whenever the IT department works with Ednetics to implement new technology, Small says, they are able to leverage the knowledge and the technical skills of the Ednetics team.

"Ednetics guides us through the install process, trains us, and teaches us how to administer the product," he notes. "If something goes wrong, we can pick up the phone, put in a ticket, and know they'll get right back to us."

In effect, Small says, working with Ednetics enables Centralia College to deploy and systematically maintain cutting-edge technologies without incurring extra staff costs. He likes the fact that Ednetics doesn't sell or represent products they don't support, so he doesn't have to worry about keeping the technology running.

Technology Know-How Plus Industry Insight

Looking more broadly at the benefits of working with Ednetics, Small says he appreciates the ability to have conversations with Ednetics staff about educational technology. He can discover what other college IT departments are doing and where Centralia is compared with some of the other schools, including the larger schools Ednetics works with.

He and his team can also learn about technology trends in education, and get feedback on the direction Small hopes to take campus IT. Ednetics can also keep Small posted on where the industry is going, and give his team a heads-up in the event of coming price increases or shifts.

"Over the years we've worked together," Small says, "we've come to really trust our relationship with Ednetics. We know that whatever the issue, we're able to leverage the teams' technical skills and industry insights, get our needs addressed quickly and thoroughly, and plan for the future."

Ednetics brings IT services and solutions to education and public sector communities. We focus on opportunities to improve education and government settings through the use of advanced technologies. We have developed a comprehensive portfolio by working closely with customers to understand their needs. The Ednetics team includes contractors, specialized engineers, dedicated support, and project managers with an affinity for technology and a desire to be the best at what we do. We are inspired by how technology can help and we love making a difference.