Shore School gets bang-for-buck with ICT Networks core network rebuild

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Problem: Core network was end-of-life

Solution: Replace incumbent technology with suite of Juniper Networks switch and routing solutions, complete PoE and 10g trunks

Challenge: Complete the network rollout with minimal disruption to school operations

Result: Deployment of a high-performance network ready to handle data intensive applications for the next 10 years

SYDNEY

When one of Australia's most respected schools embarked on a project to rebuild its core network, little did they know at the start they would completely change their lead vendor and vastly expand the scope of the project.

But that's exactly what happened with Sydney's Shore school when it engaged with Juniper systems integrator ICT Networks late last year.

The result, according to the ICT manager of Sydney's Shore School Richard Jones, has been the future-proofing of the school's bandwidth needs for the next decade, full power-over-Ethernet across campus, critical new fibre infrastructure, and a redesigned network topology, all with unrivalled service guarantees and support.

An institution priding itself on practical, traditional values, Shore has earned a reputation as one of Australia's leading schools for boys. And it was with this sense of practical purpose that Jones applied in undertaking one of Shore's largest ever IT projects.

He was adamant Shore develop a clear and practical understanding of the role technology plays in improving learning. "For instance, acknowledging that a basic level of access is mandatory and working with that simple premise." With tertiary qualifications in IT and extensive hands-on experience both within education and in the corporate world, Jones was able to approach the networking rebuild with a clear vision of the project; what it would cost to complete and the specific desired outcomes.

When it came to the crunch, replacing the incumbent with Juniper Networks proved a more cost-effective option for this education leader.

"Network bandwidth won't be an issue for 10 years"

"Their depth of knowledge and integrity were key to getting the project to where it is today"

"I took great confidence from how rapidly I got responses back from ICT Networks and at no time did I feel that we were dealing with salesmen driven just by money"

ICTNETWORKS

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FROM THE BEGINNING

Initially, Jones opted to undertake the project with Shore's incumbent vendor, but in the process of talking to Sydney-based Juniper integrator, ICT Networks, realised an opportunity to get significantly better value. This translated into a broadening of the project's scope and therefore a better overall outcome for teachers, students and administrators. "With the better value-for-money being offered by ICT Networks, my inclination was to say let's do the whole thing properly."

But Jones admits it was a daunting task managing the expanded risk. Not only was there the risk of changing vendors, but also the fact that every switch in the school had to be changed "It was like performing open heart surgery; we had to do a major replacement without disrupting any of the other organs."

D-DAY

Jones scheduled a block of two days during school holidays to get the whole project done without causing any disruption to normal activities. The first task was to get into every switch location on campus to unpatch from the incumbent's core and patch to Juniper's core. Of key concern was ensuring the new configuration functioned properly.

A key element of the project involved Jones and his team engineering out a number of intermediate fibre patch points, and creating dedicated fibres to the locations with the highest usage. At the same time, power-over-Ethernet was delivered right across campus "We had the situation of having hundreds of computers fighting for a 1g pathway to the core."

Jones compares the success of the project as the equivalent of futureproofing a new road against future traffic congestion. "Network bandwidth won't be an inhibitor for 10 years." He views this as especially important given today's heavy emphasis on digital learning.

VIRTUOUS PARTNERSHIP

Jones says he was impressed by the complete clarity he received from ICT, in particular the visibility of the pricing model, which he says was presented like a "menu".

"We regarded Juniper as rock-solid switching company with a Telco background." And partnering with ICT Networks turned out to be exactly the right decision, as the systems integrator was always focused beyond simply what Shore asked for.

Jones describes Shore's relationship with ICT Networks as a 'virtuous partnership', whereby the supplier was always fully engaged and constantly alert to the potential for improvement.

"They are very good at working together internally to turn things around quickly and we had complete clarity at all times."

Jones also noted that ICT Networks style of engagement showed that it properly understood what he and the School wanted to achieve.

"They would often say 'we understand what you're trying to do here but we think this approach would be easier.' "