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CHELTENHAM COLLEGE

FUTURE VOICE FUTUREPROOFS CHELTENHAM COLLEGE'S COMMUNICATIONS

About Cheltenham College

Formed in 1841, Cheltenham College is a co-educational Day and Boarding school at the heart of the Cotswolds consisting of Cheltenham Prep (for ages 3-13) and Cheltenham College (for ages 13-18), which provides outstanding facilities for academics, sports, the Arts and Boarding life.

THE CHALLENGE

Consisting of 40+ buildings spread across Cheltenham, Cheltenham College had long leveraged an Alcatel-based mix of analogue and digital lines tied to traditional deskphones, requiring a complex combination of cabling and on-site hardware. This meant that adding any new lines or sites to the phone system was challenging and expensive, especially considering the frequency of hardware requiring replacement and ongoing maintenance.

David Martin, Cheltenham's Head of IT, knew the system needed to be modernised and futureproofed, considering the Landline channel the college currently used wouldn't work past 2025. Covid then brought the need for a new, cloud-based to the forefront as the college adopted Teams as a short-term solution.

While David and his team did their own research, and liked 8x8's proposition, they still wanted support in navigating the journey and ensuring the solution deployed was fit for purpose and deployed efficiently over the college's only significant downtime – the summer holidays.

After reaching out to its existing Microsoft partner, Future Voice was recommended to Cheltenham College, given the team's experience and successes in supporting comms solutions for the education sector.

"We knew that the PSTN Switch Off was looming and that our existing Alcatel system was in need of a more modern replacement."
David Martin, Head of IT, Cheltenham College

THE SOLUTION

David didn't want to burden his small IT team with managing a 'basic' solution, especially given the breadth and complexity of managing so many individual sites, requiring more time to make changes and manage in-life. Instead, Cheltenham College preferred a more hands-off solution, that Future Voice could manage on its behalf, even if it required a higher investment level.

After evaluating multiple platforms, including 3CX – a more cost-effective solution – 8x8 was ultimately chosen after evaluating the user interface and capabilities, with 8x8 being more customisable, intuitive and easier to manage.

One of Future Voice's first challenges was ensuring value for money, auditing the college's sprawling system to identify lines and services that wouldn't need replacing as part of the new system.

The final challenge in deploying the solution was ensuring the vast multi-site deployment would be performed within Cheltenham's tight timescale – just 6 weeks, including porting over 300+ numbers from the previous suppliers from across the estate.

Future Voice pulled out all the stops, and while there were issues along the way, detailed project management performed by Future Voice's Professional Services team ensured the system was fully tested and operational before the autumn term started, even providing training to the college's IT team so that they could fully control the system and manage any in-life amends and additions.

"Future Voice put a hell of a lot of effort into working with our legacy phone number providers to ensure we hit the timeline. I dread to think how it would have turned out without their exemplary support and advice." ***David Martin***

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THE RESULTS

One of the main benefits of Cheltenham College's new cloud-based 8x8 system was the flexibility it provides, enabling new lines and redirects to different areas of the campus to be made in minutes, not months.

By performing an audit of the college's sprawling comms stack, Future Voice was able to reduce the number of lines to approximately 300 handsets, and while the total cost of the service was roughly the same as the previous comms solution, Cheltenham College now had a flexible, reliable and agile communication solution that delivers far greater value for money.

Furthermore, Cheltenham College is completely futureproofed from the 2025 PSTN Switch Off, as the new UCaaS solution will not be affected by the deactivation of the 'Landline' network.

David is so impressed with the solution that he is now exploring the process of deploying mobile apps on staff phones to remove the need for deskphones across the campus, including Mobile Device Management, safeguarding and more factors increasing the complexity of what appears on the surface to be a simple switch.

"The new system was adopted with minimal issues and the success of the deployment is evident in the fact that it feels like nothing's changed. Of all the It projects I've been involved in, Future Voice's support through this migration has been the smoothest I've experienced."
David Martin

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