Case Study

Clark Atlanta University

Project: Upgrading to unified communications
Major challenge: Update the university's telecommunications system with new technology that can handle today's demands

The background

Clark Atlanta University's (CAU's) mission is to prepare a diverse community of learners to excel and to become responsible, productive, and innovative citizen leaders, locally and globally. The origins of the university—Clark College, the first private liberal arts school in the country for African Americans, and Atlanta University, the nation's oldest graduate institution—date back to the Reconstruction. In 1988, the university consolidated Clark College and Atlanta University on a single campus in the heart of Atlanta, and today it offers 38 undergraduate, graduate, doctoral degree, and specialist programs and develops socially, globally responsible leaders.

By 2009, however, CAU realized its aged and inflexible telecommunications system had failed to keep pace with larger technological changes. The system's limitations reached a critical point in 2010, when parents inquiring about changes in federal financial aid policies flooded the school with nearly three times the normal call volume and overwhelmed the system. At that point, CAU's new associate vice president and CIO Reggie Brinson had been on the job less than a year. "We couldn't see all the calls that were coming in," he recalls. "This was unacceptable." CAU then tasked him with finding an adequate solution that would significantly reduce costs while providing improved functionality and expanded capability.

The incident only served to underscore larger ongoing communications challenges that needed to be addressed, including:

- The legacy PBX had reached the end of its life and would not allow CAU to fully exploit the voice over IP capability of the switch; an upgrade would have required investing in a new server and software.

- CAU's annual contract with its long-term service provider was costly and about to expire, leading it to reconsider its entire approach to communications systems and contracts.

- CAU wanted a flexible unified communications system that could easily manage the university's extensive network and volume of phones and integrate faxes, SMS, and voice messaging communications, especially with fluctuating call volumes during the registration period.

- Budget constraints, coupled with increased communications demands, necessitated taking a smarter, longer-term approach to technology.

The solution

From the time Brinson arrived at CAU, he knew that the school's communications capabilities were rapidly becoming obsolete. Working closely with Phyllis McCrary, manager of telecommunications, he proposed moving CAU to a campus-wide IP unified communications system that would move the school to IP phones, improve call center capability, and allow the phasing out of many analog phones.

CAU looked at several solutions but ultimately chose a carrier-grade, open, native SIP-based unified communications application from Siemens Enterprise Communications, including the OpenScape Voice application and OpenScape Contact Center running on the OpenScape UC Server. Because the OpenScape

"We needed to know that we had partners that are in the boat with us, partners that are dedicated to providing extraordinary solutions and customer service. Siemens and Black Box really stepped up to the plate."

Dr. Carlton Brown, President, Clark Atlanta University

BLACK BOX®
NETWORK SERVICES

solution uses open standards, CAU envisions integrating its communications system with its new Microsoft Live@edu student e-mail system and SharePoint® collaboration platform for faculty and staff.

To advise the university and implement the system, CAU chose Black Box Network Services. "We were looking to acquire a solution we could depend upon in terms of its longevity and fit, and looking progressively at where the capabilities would go forth," Brinson says. "We didn't want to repeat the past."

Business benefits

The move to OpenScape Voice running on Siemens Enterprise Communications OpenScape UC Server eliminated the shortcomings associated with simply extending CAU's legacy telecommunications platform and delivered new capabilities to meet the future needs of the university.

Some of the most notable benefits include:

- **A 50 percent reduction in ongoing support costs.** CAU was locked into a costly contract with a company whose solution would not provide the full capabilities CAU demanded and was near the end of its life. By switching to a Siemens Enterprise OpenScape solution and Black Box consulting services, CAU eliminated expenses related to forced, "Band-Aid" type fixes and add-ons.

- **New capabilities and convenience delivered to students, faculty, and staff.** Users can take advantage of integrated IP phone, voice messaging, and SMS communications anywhere on campus. The university now provides true mobile gained Caller ID and an expanded call center feature set to handle inbound calls more efficiently.

- **A responsive and visionary support partner.** CAU was able to move from an unsatisfactory support relationship to one that "not only met our current business requirements but could help us with what we should be looking at going forward."

- **Minimized disruption.** By adopting a phased approach to implementation, CAU needed a solution that was flexible enough to accommodate continued use of analog phones for an unspecified period of time.

- **An immediate positive impact on users.** With the Siemens® open, standards-based OpenScape UC solution and the security of ongoing support from Black Box, CAU was able to immediately give users a greater array of options and services, reducing frustration and call wait times. The additional flexibility, scalability, and features of OpenScape ensure that the University can plan for and keep pace with emerging communications trends to meet the future needs of the faculty, students, and extended CAU family.