

Thursday, May 29, 2008

Clark County schools give coax the 'ax'

Tue, Oct 02, 2007

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Delivering cable TV programming over its WAN is saving this large district up to \$200K for each new school it builds

By Dennis Pierce, Managing Editor, eSchool News

Primary Topic Channel: [Video technologies](#)

Saving anywhere from \$50,000 to \$200,000 by not having to install coaxial cable TV networks in each new school that is built would be a welcome development for any school system. When you're building 10 or 11 new schools a year as Nevada's Clark County School District (CCSD) in Las Vegas is, however, you're talking about a significant amount of money spared.

"That's a lot of savings," said Philip Brody, chief technology officer for the 310,000-student district, the nation's fifth largest (and fastest growing). "It really starts to add up."

CCSD stopped putting coaxial cable, or "coax," in its new schools after a pilot project to study the feasibility of the idea proved highly successful two years ago. Now, instead of running over coax, all video service for the district's new schools going forward--23 buildings and counting--is streamed over the schools' Internet Protocol (IP) networks, Brody said.

CCSD uses Video Furnace's video-over-IP service as its video distribution system. Video Furnace reportedly delivers TV-quality video, either live or on-demand, to any network-connected viewing device, such as a desktop or laptop computer, without requiring any special client player software.

The system is "incredibly easy to use," Brody said. "The interface is virtually identical to that of cable TV."

Clark County is one of only a handful of school systems in the country that licenses its own public TV station, KLVX. At the KLVX facility, a special digital encoder appliance streams cable TV channels and other video content to each new school in digital format across the district's gigabit Ethernet network.

It is this high-speed wide-area network (WAN)--which supports data transfer speeds of up to 1,000 megabits per second to each building, or more than 600 times faster than a T1 line--that makes such a project possible.

"Having bandwidth is a luxury," Brody said. "When we envisioned our WAN, I always thought video would be big; that's why you need bandwidth."

Streaming cable TV over its computer network is just one way CCSD is taking advantage of IP-based video. The district continues to provide video-on-demand service to its 18,000 teachers, Brody said, and last year it recorded some 300,000 video downloads. In addition, CCSD has deployed video conferencing systems in about 40 school sites throughout the county.

The district is using portable, IP-based systems from Polycom for its video conferencing. The cart-based system consists of a camera that plugs into any network jack; a 32-inch flat-panel display, and a device that plugs into the camera. This device, Polycom's Visual Concert, allows users to attach their computer or a document camera to the conferencing device via a USB port to incorporate files into their presentation.

Before, "it was always a pain if you wanted to show a PowerPoint presentation--you had to have special software," Brody explained. "With this system, you can plug in any laptop or camera, and it converts the signal and sends it over your WAN. You never have to worry about software compatibility; you just need a standard video cable."

Whereas curricular activities typically drive the use of video conferencing in many school systems, in Clark County it is administrative applications that are driving use of the technology, at least for now. In a district with an area the size of New Jersey, teachers and administrators are finding it extremely useful to employ video conferencing for meetings and training.

"At the end of the day, no one wants to jump in a car and drive several miles to a training session," Brody said. "Now, we're meeting with our curriculum people to [spur the use of video conferencing] in our instruction, too."

He concluded: "This is our year for video breakout."

Links:

[Clark County School District](#)

[Video Furnace](#)

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