

Northern Health School

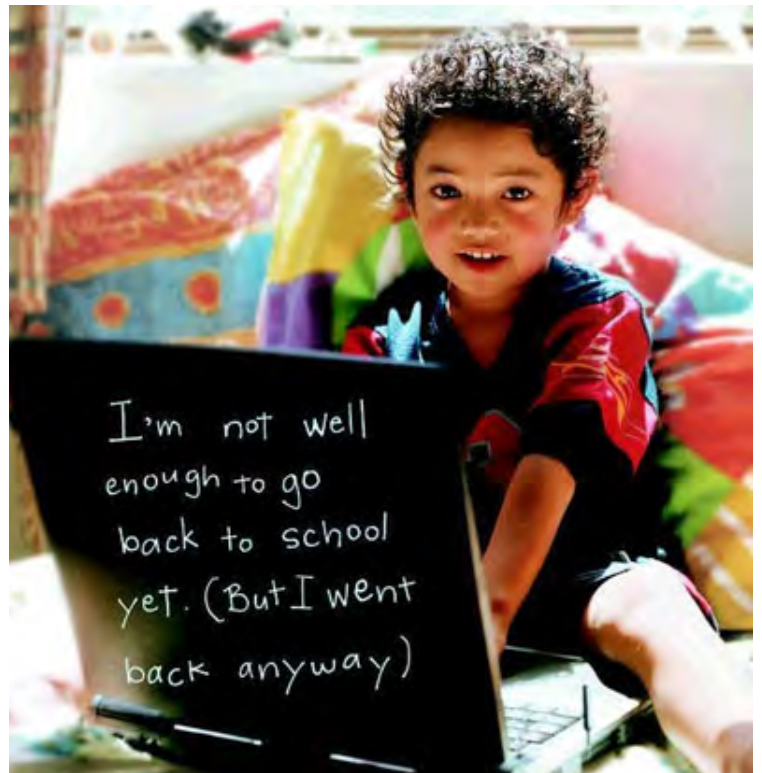
Microsoft Lync at NHS - A game-changer

“Microsoft Lync has helped us reduce telecommunications costs by 40% and is making huge improvements in the way we communicate amongst ourselves and students. Microsoft Lync has been a game changer for us.”

Richard Winder, Principal, Northern Health School

Northern Health School, with 17 regional offices and more than 120 full- and part-time staff, has realised a 40% reduction in telecommunications costs after installing Microsoft Lync to manage their voice and data applications. But those savings are just the beginning. “Once we roll out Lync to our home-based students and enable teachers and students to collaborate on-line,” says NHS Principal Richard Winder, “we’ll be able to significantly reduce drive times so that teachers can spend more time instructing and less time driving. And on top of that Lync itself offers a raft of capabilities - such as video-conferencing, digital diaries, point-of-presence - that are already making huge improvements in the way we communicate amongst ourselves and students. Microsoft Lync has been a game changer for us.”

New Era, leading provider of ICT services and solutions to the NZ education sector and a Microsoft Gold Partner, helped specify the solution, managed the implementation process and now provides on-going support.



Northern Health School caters for hundreds of home/ community- and hospital-based year 0-13 students with high health needs and offers students a variety of modes of service delivery. Teaching is provided through student support centres, hospital ward and classroom support, on-line learning and community home visits.

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Complex communications requirements

Due to the geographically-dispersed nature of their mandate, NHS relies heavily on voice and data communications to coordinate their activities. They had employed a PBX (private branch exchange) that supported voice, FAX and internet access amongst their regional offices. However, as NHS expanded their services and footprint around the country, their telecommunications requirements became more complex. Indeed, some offices had up to eight separate phone lines to keep up with demand.

“We knew we needed to upgrade,” continues Winder. “Our PBX system was becoming dated and we wanted to be able to take advantage of the collaboration tools that a digital system would provide. We discussed our requirements with New Era, our ICT support partner, and they suggested that we look at implementing a fibre-based wide area network as the backbone and Microsoft Lync as our unified communications platform.”

Additional capabilities and tight integration

“We had been advising NHS on ICT on a regular basis as a ‘value-add’ to our on-going support contract,” says Tony Gilbert, Education and Client Services Manager at New Era, “and had built a very good understanding of their capabilities and requirements. We knew that Microsoft Lync would give them the additional telecommunications functionality they required and provide plenty of scope of expansion. In addition, Lync is optimised to integrate cleanly with their other Microsoft solutions such as Active Directory and Microsoft Office. So we had no hesitation what-so-ever in recommending that they implement Lync across the enterprise.”

New Era arranged a site visit to a school with similar

“We liked what we saw,” says Winder, “and were impressed by how well Lync addressed their various voice and data applications. Plus New Era themselves are power users of Lync and rely on it for many of their day-to-day activities. So we had every confidence that Lync would be the best fit for us.”

Smooth implementation

New Era’s implementation progressed in tandem with NHS’s roll out of their wide area network (WAN). “We worked closely with Spark (formerly Telecom) as they linked the regional offices with fibre,” notes Gilbert. “The first step was to install Lync Server 2013 at their Auckland headquarters and then connect the various regional offices as the WAN was implemented. Some of the NHS units are based at hospitals so we had to adjust for their firewalls and security protocols which provided a few challenges, but by and large the entire project progressed very smoothly.”

“Staff training was fast-tracked by the unexpected demise of our PBX partway through the roll-out,” says Winder. “New Era took it all in stride and provided immediate hands-on training for both administrators and instructors as required.”

“The team at New Era have been very good in respect to delivering what they promise. Their skills with Microsoft are impressive and they are always proactive with support.”

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Because Lync is part of the overall Microsoft solution suite, staff are already familiar with their common interfaces and operations. This gives users a head start as they use the solution.”

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Immediate benefits

The benefits started to accrue immediately. “In addition to the significant savings on telecommunications,” continues Winder, “we made immediate use of the video-conferencing functionality. Clear communications are an important part of our management process and having the ability to talk virtually ‘face-to-face’ has brought our staff closer together. We also plan to use video-conferencing more extensively for teaching as well.”

Lync also helps NHS coordinate teacher activities in the field. “It’s much easier to communicate with Lync’s ‘presence’ function,” he says, “as we can see who is available and who is not. With access to everyone’s digital diary, missed calls and ‘phone tag’ are a thing of the past.”

The success of the Lync roll-out has encouraged NHS to extend their engagement with Microsoft.

AT A GLANCE

Key reasons NHS selected Microsoft Lync:

- Fully-capable of underpinning NHS’ complex unified communications requirements
- Successful implementations at other schools as well as at New Era itself
- Tight integration with other Microsoft solutions

Key benefits for NHS:

- 40% reduction in telecommunications costs
- Faster, more effective communications with video-conferencing and ‘presence’
- Potential to reduce travel time for teachers with home-based students

New Era Professional Services:

- Installation of Lync Server at NHS central facility
- Installation of Lync Clients at regional offices
- Professional development and training
- On-going support including help desk

“The management team at NHS have been regular attendees of our Microsoft in Education Seminars and were aware of the advantages of related solutions like Office 365,” says Gilbert. “We have a full-time Microsoft ‘evangelist’, John Phelps, who works with schools to illustrate the benefits that Microsoft brings to schools. As a result, we will be spearheading the Office 365 roll-out in the first half of 2015 with SharePoint tentatively scheduled after that.”

“The team at New Era have been very good in respect to delivering what they promise,” concludes Winder. Their skills with Microsoft are impressive and they are always proactive with support. Our goal is to create an environment for teachers to deliver the best outcome for students. And these resources give us just that.”

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