

How Voice Over IP (VoIP) Is Saving One District Money and Time



The inability to call into or out of a school not only halts productivity but also cultivates frustration and anxiety among district leaders, staff, and parents. Whether a phone system is down for five minutes or five hours, technology teams must field questions from concerned stakeholders. Lewis County School District (Lewis) made the transformative step to deploy a hosted voice over IP (VoIP) service to remedy this issue and ensure 99.999% uptime for all its buildings.

Lewis is a small school district serving approximately 1,650 students in Middle Tennessee. Justin Hildenbrandt is the district's technology director, and he has been with the district for 22 years. Not only does Hildenbrandt lead the technology department—he IS the technology department, operating as a one-man shop responsible for everything from overseeing the district's critical systems and infrastructure to repairing broken Chromebooks and managing the technology budget.

Creating efficiencies is critical to Hildenbrandt given his high demand. After dealing with escalating costs, unpredictable pricing models, severe maintenance issues, and poor customer support, he determined the district's phone system wasn't meeting demands and needed to be replaced.

PAIN POINTS

Escalating Costs and Unpredictable Pricing



Prior to the start of the pandemic, Lewis began to see exponential increases in its monthly phone bills. Additionally, the charges varied month-to-month, making it impossible for the district to budget for the escalating expenses. The situation only worsened during the pandemic when teachers had to call parents' cell phones to stay connected with students and their parents. The district was charged long distance fees for calls placed to cell phones, causing their already inflated bills to soar upwards.

“Our former provider kept raising our rates every other month, so it quickly became very expensive,” said Hildenbrandt. “It got to the point where our district phone bill was costing us thousands of dollars each month, which isn't sustainable for a district our size.”

Ongoing Maintenance and Poor Support

In addition to dealing with expensive monthly phone bills, Hildenbrandt also spent a large amount of time trying to maintain and fix the district's aging on-premises phone system.

Because Lewis' voice provider outsourced customer support, Hildenbrandt had to contact the provider's vendor partners when there was a problem. He often struggled to get help and would sometimes have to wait days to receive a call back or get a technician onsite.

Compounding the situation, the provider and its vendor partners often discontinued equipment, making it very difficult for Hildenbrandt to replace phones or broken parts. eBay became his go-to destination for finding replacement phones and equipment.

"The phones themselves from eBay weren't too expensive, but I never knew if they were going to work," said Hildenbrandt. "If a school's communication system is completely shut down and parents don't have a way to communicate, it's terrible. It causes a lot of frustration and anxiety, and we knew we needed to remedy the situation quickly."

THE SOLUTION

Hildenbrandt jumped into action and reached out to at least four providers for information about their services. ENA's VoIP solution quickly rose to the top because of its flat-rate pricing and easy deployment model.

"No other vendor could tell me exactly what their VoIP product was going to cost, and they couldn't guarantee the phone was going to work," said Hildenbrandt. "Other vendors also told me they'd have to install a new circuit and switches just for our phones. With ENA, we didn't have to do any of that. They did some simple backend work, and all I had to do was plug in the phones. It was great."

The district rolled out [ENA SmartVoice](#), ENA's hosted VoIP solution, to the district's high school first because that site had the most expensive phone bill. District leaders quickly decided to deploy ENA's VoIP solution to the rest of their schools after seeing a significant cost reduction in their first ENA monthly invoice.

ROBUST FEATURES AND RELIABLE COMMUNICATIONS

In addition to saving money with their ENA VoIP system, the school district is also enjoying a robust new feature set, access to a live customer support team 24x7x365, and an enterprise-level quality of service and reliability.

"I don't have to worry about our phones anymore," said Hildenbrandt. "Every day, I used to have to devote time to making sure the phones were working correctly. I don't have to do that anymore because I know ENA has it covered. Also, features like call transfer have been transformative for us because we didn't have that before. Now we can transfer a call instead of telling an individual to hang up and call a different number."

Moreover, the ENA customer technical assistance center (CTAC) has enabled Hildenbrandt to shift his focus to more critical tasks. Instead of devoting precious work hours to reconfiguring a phone when an employee has left or transferred buildings, he just contacts ENA's customer support engineers for moves, adds, and changes (MACs) including password or pin resets. "It takes ENA just a few minutes to make those changes, which is pretty great," said Hildenbrandt.

"That level of customer support has been especially helpful this year because we've had a lot of staff members move around. I'm a one-man shop, so having access to a team like the ENA CTAC is a gamechanger."

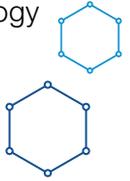
Hildenbrandt has also been using the VoIP solution's [mobile app](#) to stay connected to staff members, both inside and outside of the district. "It's pretty slick. I'm always out of my office and in the field working. Before, people had to leave me a voicemail. Now, I can receive calls on my cell phone wherever I am, so that's been helpful because it enables me to address questions or issues sooner," said Hildenbrandt.

BEYOND VOIP

Once the school district deployed its new VoIP system, leaders also decided to deploy a [new paging system and bell schedulers](#) at the high school. Hildenbrandt has been using those devices to record and play the principal's daily greeting and national anthem. "The principal loves that he doesn't have to be in his office at a certain time every morning to deliver his greeting. The message is pre-recorded and starts playing at a designated time. We are going to start using more features like that to streamline operations and increase efficiencies," said Hildenbrandt.

WHAT'S NEXT

Now that the district has a new reliable VoIP solution in place, it can focus on other technology initiatives and projects. "Our next big project is rolling out new laptops to all our teachers and to install new interactive panels," said Hildenbrandt.



"I appreciate how much our new VoIP system has enabled me to focus on enhancing our digital learning environment for our staff and students instead of reviewing phone bills and dealing with outages and broken equipment. It's been a tremendous asset for our district."

Learn more about ENA's cost-effective and reliable VoIP solutions

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