NTT DATA

Education | Australia

Southern Cross University achieves cost, flexibility and sustainability goals with migration to MS Teams telephony

Client profile

Southern Cross University was established in 1994 and has built a reputation as one of Australia's most innovative universities. Southern Cross has more than 2,000 staff and over 18,000 students and operates from three main campuses on Australia's east coast, several branch campuses, metro campuses in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, and from The Hotel School Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Hayman Island.

Why NTT DATA?

- Proven capabilities with the technology
- Ease of integrating PSTN services with Southern Cross University's internal Microsoft Teams environment
- Reliability of carriage services and predictable and consistent monthly usage plan
- Co-management capabilities of NTT DATA's managed services

Southern Cross University

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I've upgraded PABX systems at other universities in the past, but working with NTT DATA, I was bowled over by just how smooth this service was, and how easy it was to get it done.

Peter Kurtz, Senior Manager Infrastructure Platforms, Southern Cross University

Business need

- End-of-support legacy telephony needed replacement
- Operational strategy to transition to cloud-based systems
- Flexible working and spaces that promote collaboration, community and environmental sustainability

Solution

- Operator Connect for Microsoft Teams
- Managed EX Essentials Services

Outcomes

- Initial cost savings of over AUD 400,000 and estimated 44% reduction in ongoing telco spend
- Alignment with the university's cloud transition strategy and sustainability goals
- Improved staff productivity and supported a flexible working environment

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Business need

End-of-support telephony needed immediate attention

Southern Cross University needed to replace their existing on-premises unified communications infrastructure and handsets, which were approaching end of support. The university had been operating this environment and their contact center platform as a standalone systems. They wanted a new solution that would increase staff productivity and collaboration, enable flexible working, support cost-reduction and sustainability goals by removing physical handsets where possible, and maximize their Microsoft Education A5 licensing investment.

As staff were already using Microsoft Teams, Southern Cross decided to test the interoperability of the solution with the university's contact center platform through a three-month proof-of-concept pilot. This would allow them to assess whether Teams could provide all the functionality required for different use cases and departments. The pilot also gave them the chance to verify the viability of specialist handsets and conferencing devices required throughout the campuses, and validate the return on investment (ROI) estimates that had been calculated based on the full deployment.

The pilot approach allowed Southern Cross to set a benchmark before testing the market. They shortlisted three options before confirming Operator Connect for Microsoft Teams as the best solution, with the key differentiator the licensing costs. NTT DATA's Operator Connect service was chosen because it would ease the integration of PSTN services with the university's internal Microsoft Teams environment. Operator Connect also offered reliable carriage services and a predictable and consistent monthly usage plan.

"The icing on the cake was NTT DATA's Managed EX service, which includes a portal that allows us to manage most of the telephone service in-house. Our team can handle Level 1 support directly with our users and, if needed, push it out to Level 2 support or call in NTT DATA's EX team," says Peter Kurtz, Senior Manager Infrastructure Platforms, Southern Cross University.

Solution

Meeting rapid project deployment timeframes

Southern Cross University had tight deadlines, as they wanted to complete the project before the Christmas and New Year break. While a lot of the configuration of the new Teams platform could be completed by NTT DATA in advance, the mission-critical aspect of the project was porting 4,600 numbers across from Southern Cross's incumbent carrier and PABX to the new Microsoft Teams Operator Connect service.

NTT DATA's project services managed the six-week porting process. "We didn't drop one number on cutover, and it was done a lot quicker than we all expected," says Kurtz. NTT DATA also configured and cut over 26 auto attendants, 27 call queues and 14 hunt groups to the new Teams platform. This project included critical services such as campus security, a student help desk and library support.

The smaller branch and remote campuses were migrated first, which paved the way for a smooth transition for the main campuses when they were cut over two weeks later. While most staff use a softphone, where there was a requirement for physical handsets, these were all preconfigured so they could be deployed immediately on cutover.

Telephony is now accessible via each user's Microsoft Teams application, supporting both internal and external voice connections. The solution enables staff to work from home or remotely, with VPN split-tunnelling guaranteeing the quality and security of Teams calls regardless of connectivity limitations.

Southern Cross is also using NTT DATA's Managed EX (MEX) Essentials service, a comanaged services model through which Southern Cross maintains control of their estate while partnering with NTT DATA's cloud specialists, who work alongside Southern Cross's IT staff. The MEX service also provides Southern Cross with access to a services portal for unified provisioning and management, vendor platform notification monitoring and service usage reporting.

Outcomes

Southern Cross University achieves multiple strategic goals

By migrating to Microsoft Teams for their enterprise voice services, Southern Cross University has achieved multiple outcomes for the university. The solution has resulted in significant immediate and longer-term cost savings. It aligns with the university's cloud migration strategy, has enabled flexible working and improved productivity, and is helping to meet sustainability goals.

Immediate and longer-term cost savings

The university has seen an immediate saving on potential hardware, software and maintenance costs by moving to a cloud-based service. The Teams software falls under the university's existing Microsoft Education A5 licensing arrangement, and there is minimal investment in on-premises hardware and associated support. Southern Cross has realized more than AUD 400,000 in cost savings by reducing the number of new handsets required. Over the course of NTT DATA's five-year service, the university expects a total saving of 44% on telecommunications spend, with predictable monthly costs replacing their previous usage-based service.

Cloud strategy

In line with the University's strategy approved by Council, the project had to transition to cloud-based systems to reduce internal support reliance and provide greater accessibility, Southern Cross not only migrated the telephone services to cloud but also eFax services across the main and satellite campuses. The new architecture also provides better service controls and improved IT security.

Staff productivity and flexible working

Going with one platform (MS Teams) for voice calling, video calling and chat, provided one contact list usable on any device, it is now easier and quicker for staff to make and receive video and audio calls. Southern Cross's service desk can respond to requests faster, using NTT DATA's MEX service portal to make simple telephony changes. University staff now have access to the same set of telephony services and features regardless of their location, device or connectivity.

Sustainability goals

Investment in modern, flexible spaces that promote collaboration, community and environmental sustainability is a key 2030 strategy for Southern Cross. The migration to Teams has reduced their desktop IT footprint, as they are using an existing application to make and receive phone calls. It's also reduced their hardware footprint, as they now rely predominantly on softphones and eFax services, which also reduces the university's paper consumption.

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We had to replace our existing telephony infrastructure and handsets because they were approaching end of support. We knew we needed to enable flexible working and improve staff productivity by making it easier for them to make and receive calls, but it wasn't until post proof of concept the technology direction was able to be locked in.

Peter Kurtz, Senior Manager Infrastructure Platforms, Southern Cross University

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