



Arizona's Largest Credit Union Relies on Cisco Partner to Support Growth With New Network Technology

Desert Schools Federal Credit Union, headquartered in Phoenix, Arizona, is the state's largest credit union with 19 branches, and it's growing. However, the organization was facing a network crisis on a number of fronts: first and foremost, its existing network vendor was no longer going to support the network equipment the credit union had purchased. And since the network itself did not support the kind of growth the credit union was targeting, it was clearly time to take a serious look at what new technology had to offer. The organization serves more than 235,000 members and needed to support a 60 percent growth factor in the use of its technology services. With online activity for the credit union's services growing daily, the IT staff at the credit union knew the new network had to be able to handle enormous data demands and the transition had to be glitch-free.

"Our goal was to meet increasing demand for bandwidth with limited support," said Gary Laieski, project leader and senior director of information technology at Desert Schools. "We needed to do more with less." In supporting the rapid growth of the Desert Schools' e-commerce demands, Laieski also wanted to contain costs long-term and gain efficiency. He was convinced the organization would need to go with a single solution/single vendor approach. He and his associate Tom Marlowe searched for a firm that could build a network solution to help the credit union reach all of its goals. They found Calence, Inc. in nearby Tempe. Calence, a leader in building and managing network, is also a Cisco Gold Partner giving it an extremely high level of network and business credibility.





Credit Union Teams With Cisco Partner...

“Calence’s partnership with Cisco was key in our choosing them for this project,” notes Laieski. “After being abandoned by our existing network vendor, it was important that we chose equipment from a company we knew would support us long-term.” Patrick Dirck, who was a consulting director for Calence during the initial Desert Schools Credit Union project, noted that Calence’s Cisco partnerships are valuable in securing business.

“Gold-level status from Cisco proves we offer the highest level of Cisco partnership and have access to the right resources and information to get the job done,” he said. “This enabled us to offer a proposal proving we could meet Desert Schools’ technology and business objectives more cost-effectively than other firms vying for the business.”

“Calence was our clear choice right from the start,” said Laieski. “They offered the best overall solution, had the strongest ties to a dominant vendor, and had the greatest expertise, bar none.”

The staffs at Calence and Desert Schools teamed up to review the credit union’s needs and short-term and long-term goals. While Laieski says that the technical merits of the Cisco solution and the Cisco brand name were critical in his decision-making, there were risks and challenges involved. Calence wanted to use the Cisco Inverse Multiplexing Across ATM (IMA) technology to offer integrated network-access services at speeds above what T1 lines offer. But the technology was brand new at the time and the credit union couldn’t afford any downtime. So Calence further differentiated itself from competing bidders by setting up a simulated branch network to prove to Desert Schools that then-new Cisco IMA technology would meet its needs and by convincing the Desert Schools’ team that Calence had the resources and expertise to replace the network with minimal downtime.

... and ‘Rebuilds the Plane While Flying It’

Once Desert Schools made the choice to go with Calence, the real work began.

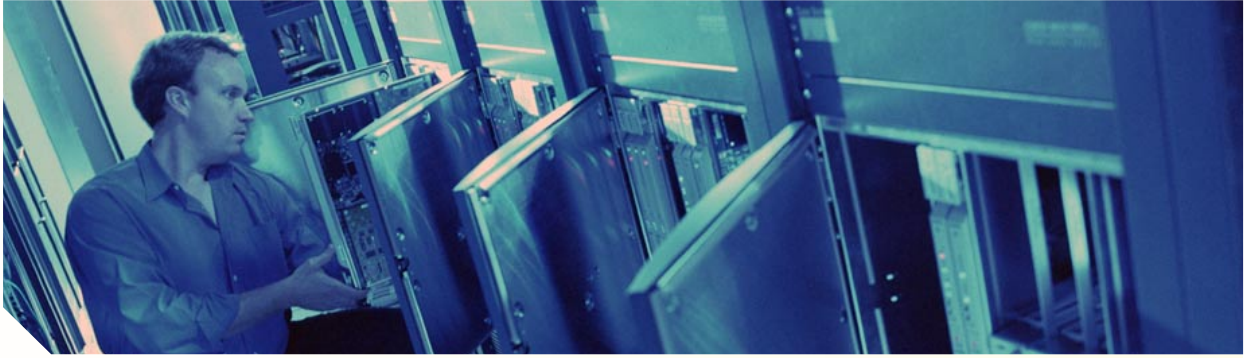
“Now we had to rebuild the airplane while flying it!” said Dirck. “We wanted to leverage new Cisco technology while at the same time ensure that Desert Schools did not experience any downtime or problems with their operations during the project.” This is where Calence’s relationship with Cisco really came into play.

“Cisco provided a local engineering group to be on-site with us,” said Laieski. “We had access to Cisco resources with calls and e-mails back to Cisco developers. We all knew we were dealing with cutting edge technology. Cisco’s commitment to resolving the every detail and Calence’s efficiency in identifying problems and implementing solutions was critical to rolling this new solution out in timely manner. We felt completely supported by Cisco and by Calence.” The Calence team was able to identify any challenges Desert Schools might come across, and then work with Cisco to resolve the problems in a short amount of time with viable solutions.

This commitment from all three teams was going to enable the credit union to achieve its networking goals: to do more with less—to meet its increasing demand for bandwidth with limited support.

“Our existing system had a single T1 line for data and one for voice,” said Laieski. “We needed a data pipe and voice over ATM. Anytime a phone handset is put down, we wanted to reclaim that bandwidth for data purposes so we can support new data centers, like kiosks, without increasing our communications expenses. Our Web site was getting 60,000 hits per day, and we wanted to support two or three times that volume.” Overall, the credit union needed the new system to allow it to support rapid growth, meet quick time-to-market demands, contain costs long-term and gain efficiency.

“It does all that, and more,” reports Laieski.



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—Gary Laieski
Senior Director of Information Technology
Desert Schools Federal Credit Union

Credit Union Flies High With New Technology Services

At the end of the day, customer satisfaction is a key differentiator in enabling a business to remain stable and grow. After deploying its new network, Desert Schools Credit Union surveyed its members to measure the availability of its online services and how it impacted the membership.

"We measured several critical areas, including phone systems, e-commerce systems and branch-to-branch communications," said Laieski. "We are achieving 99.5 percent uptime and availability and that includes our maintenance windows." And with a stable network in place, the credit union's engineers are busy working on projects that enhance the credit union's business instead of fixing network problems.

When calculating the pay-back of its new network, the Desert Schools staff asked the questions 'Does it give us future opportunities and a chance to increase revenue?' and the answer is absolutely 'yes.' For instance, Desert Schools has installed a number of kiosks that offer the credit union's Web site at key locations throughout the area. The kiosks, installed at a cost of less than a thousand dollars apiece, get 7 million page views a month and generate many millions of dollars in new loans and deposits over the internet in a secure manner.

"There's no way they could have supported that volume with their previous system," said Dirck. Desert Schools' overall goal was to do more with less, and with this new network their members get "more" and the business is enjoying the "less" part of the equation.

"By standardizing on Cisco, Desert Schools Federal Credit Union has a standardized footprint at all locations," notes Dirck. "This will enable them to grow rapidly and efficiently with the staff they have and the equipment will grow with them."



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