



## **ASTON UNIVERSITY ACHIEVES A FIRST WITH DAMOVO SOLUTION**

The higher education landscape has become increasingly competitive and universities need to work harder to attract students to their campuses. One of the incentives often used by universities to encourage student applications is the quality of ICT facilities.

Since implementing Cisco IP Communications technology from Damovo, Aston University can claim a head start over the competition, as a result of becoming the first higher education institution in the UK to deploy a converged voice, video and data network system.

Located in the heart of Birmingham, Aston University is one of the top three business schools in the country and was voted the 13th best higher education institution in the Guardian newspaper's league table this year. Aston has four Academic schools and more than 1,000 members of staff supporting 7,000 students.

### **Moving into the 21st century**

It is said that bad things happen in threes and this was certainly the case for Aston University when its telephone system, data network and moving image broadcast system all reached their capacity limit at the same time.

*"We had a very ancient telephone system: it was 25 years old and second-hand when we bought it,"* explains Fahri Zihni, CIO at Aston University. It had run out of capacity and was unable to provide the modern features and functionality Aston University demanded in the 21st century. The same was true of the data network and moving image broadcast system, which were becoming unreliable and increasingly difficult to maintain since the support staff that had been in place when the system had been bought, had now retired!

Far from seeing it as a bad thing, Zihni considered it fortunate that the telephone, data and moving image broadcast systems all had to be replaced.

## INSTALLATION ACHIEVED WITH MINIMUM DISRUPTION AND INTERFERENCE

***“It was a coincidence that we needed to replace all three things at the same time, but it provided a compelling business case to put in a converged network,”*** he explains.

### Finding a partner for the future

Once Aston had decided what it needed, it carried out a procurement process to select a partner. As well as demanding resilience and reliability of the new solution, it was important that data and voice ran over the same network. The new system also had to be able to support increased demand for using audiovisual equipment in classrooms and lectures, which Aston anticipates will rise in popularity over time.

After evaluating various solutions available on the market, Aston awarded Damovo a £4 million contract for the provision of a Cisco-based, converged IP network. The Cisco architecture forms the technology platform for voice, video and integrated data and enables Aston to handle calls in a more sophisticated manner and use streaming video for moving images.

The project – known as AstonIP internally – was jointly managed and developed by Damovo and Aston’s ICT teams. ***“Damovo put the new network in for us and also helped us with the migration of servers from the old network to the new,”*** says Zihni. ***“The team were highly professional throughout the implementation and we are looking forward to developing our relationship with Damovo over the next 12 months.”*** Additional support was provided by Improcom, which helped develop the specification of the project and oversaw some of the work involved.

The cabling installation began in November 2003 and was largely achieved with minimum disruption and interference as the team worked closely with area occupants and adopted out-of-hours working practices when necessary.

The first building to use the converged voice and data services was the new Academy of Life Sciences building, which went live in March 2004. The rest of the university campus soon followed and in July 2004, the moving image system was showcased at the 2004 degree ceremonies.

The ceremonies were broadcast live on displays throughout the university’s environs using streaming video over the converged network.

### Mission critical investment in communications

The implementation is now fully complete and Damovo will continue to provide some network support for at least 12 months. October 18 was the all-important date when the telephone switchover took place, but it passed without a hitch and take-up was significant. ***“On that day alone, more than 800 people logged in,”*** says Zihni. The moving image system was put through its paces again three days later, to broadcast the installation of Aston University’s new Chancellor, Sir Michael Bett.

***“...the team was highly professional throughout the implementation...”***



## SWITCHOVER PASSED WITHOUT A HITCH

***“The ceremony was broadcast over our university network on screens in lecture theatres and halls. With the help of our partners, we also relayed it to Centenary Square in Birmingham,”*** adds Zihni. ***“It gives you an idea of the kind of power the new system gives us.”***

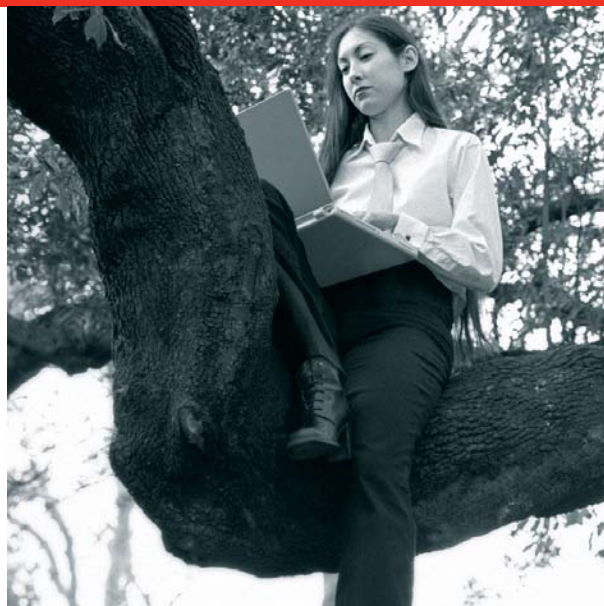
Students might not notice the change at first – aside from the new telephone handsets and connection boxes installed throughout campus – but it will dramatically improve the service they receive from the university and their overall learning experience.

***“Now we have a significant competitive advantage over other universities trying to provide first class services to their students and staff,”*** says Zihni. ***“For example, we can offer multimedia learning materials over the network easily, whereas other establishments might struggle with capacity.”*** He expects a significant expansion in the use of these services over the next 12 months.

The installation was no small undertaking: Aston now has 6,500 outlets and more than 50 wiring centres around campus supporting these. The benefits, however, far outweigh any initial doubts. ***“We are the only university in the country to have deployed a fully converged voice, video and data network,”*** says Zihni.

On an operational level, the new system provides students and staff with a fast and reliable data network, much-needed extra capacity and user-friendly features. Users can also take their own speed dial and directory services with them to any of the VoIP phones on the campus and be accountable for all calls made on their ‘direct dial in’ number.

Additionally, the moving image broadcast system equips Aston with significant potential to schedule live broadcasts and offer new, interactive services for students in the future. The cumulative effect is



that not only have Aston’s communications entered the 21st century, but the university is now far more attractive to future students, which in the competitive higher education market can only be a good thing.

Commenting on the implementation at Aston University, Damovo’s managing director, Paul Butcher says, ***“Aston University has excelled itself in achieving a UK first as the only higher education institution to date to have deployed a converged voice, video and data network system. The project has already proved itself a success and we congratulate Aston on taking a forward-thinking approach to the learning needs of students today and in the future.”***

***“Now we have a significant advantage over other universities ...providing first class services to students and staff”***

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