



Overview

Country: Canada

Industry: Primary, Secondary and Adult Education

Customer Profile

The English-language Western Québec School Board services some 7,800 elementary, secondary and adult education students, and boasts about 1,100 full-time employees out of 1,500 employees in total.

Business Challenge

The Western Québec School Board was faced with outmoded intercom and paging technology that did not integrate with their new IP PBX.

Solution

The board decided to implement BlazeCast and its related BlazePoint speaker system after looking at all of the system's features – including a controller enabling overhead IP paging to be targeted to only those locations that need to hear the message, and the ability to control school bell schedules.

WESTERN QUÉBEC SCHOOL BOARD DEPLOYS ADVANCED IP PAGING SYSTEM

Challenge

The English-language Western Québec School Board is one of the biggest boards in the province, at least geography-wise. It services some 7,800 elementary, secondary and adult education students, and covers a vast territory twice the size of Nova Scotia. Headquartered in Gatineau, it boasts about 1,100 full-time employees out of 1,500 employees in total.

The school board was faced with replacing its outmoded telephone and intercom system, as some buildings are as old as the 1930s. Some schools also had equipment from one company, others from another company. The board decided to set up a new, unified phone system on the Mitel 3300 IP Communications Platform.

However, Greg Charron – the Superintendent of Finance, Buildings and Technology – was looking for something more. The board wanted a product that would allow it to set up an IP intercom and paging service in its 35 schools that allowed it to make daily announcements to its students and control the use of the school bell systems, among other things. It needed to be integrated with the Mitel 3300 platform.

Enter BlazeCast

Mitel recommended that the school board investigate one of its leading partner companies, Benbria, which offered a product called BlazeCast. That product is a cross-media unified notification and paging solution designed to meet the communications needs of different organizations, such as schools.

After looking at all of the system's features – including a controller enabling overhead IP paging to be targeted to only those locations that need to hear the message, and the ability to control school bell schedules – the board decided to implement BlazeCast and its related BlazePoint speaker system on a trial, school-by-school basis.



INSTALLATION AT A GLANCE

Western Québec School Board

- » 7,800 students
- » 1,500 employees
- » 34 schools

Features

- » BlazeCast's messaging system to be used to contact parents and other stakeholders by Fall 2010
- » BlazePoint two-way talkback speakers to be used in the event of a security incident
- » IP paging system will allow the school board to page any individual classroom, or all classrooms en masse.paging zones on 3 campuses

Cost Savings

- » The board no longer has to pay up to \$250,000 a year in maintenance costs to its phone and intercom system
- » Expected savings over the long-term

"We're going to leverage BlazeCast to increase the security of our students. ... If we ever have a (security) incident, we plan to use the (BlazePoint) speakers to listen in the corridors (of the school), to find out where the people are and what they're doing."

- Greg Charron

Superintendent of Finance, Buildings and
Technology
Western Québec School Board

A new messaging system

Charron says teachers and principals in his schools were excited about BlazeCast's messaging system, which allows schools to contact parents and other stakeholders in bulk by a phone or e-mail message.

"It's really important for an organization (such as ours) to communicate with our stakeholders," says Charron. "During the evening, all of our telephone lines that we normally use to conduct business are dark. We can use those (telephone lines at that time) to call parents, call taxpayers, (and) inform teachers whether (or not) they're coming back next year. We're going to use it (BlazeCast) for all communication with parents and employees."

Improving security

What's more, BlazeCast, and its related speaker system, BlazePoint, will help make schools in the board much more secure.

"We're going to leverage BlazeCast to increase the security of our students," says Charron. "What really impressed us was the two-way talkback feature on the (BlazePoint) speakers. God forbid, if we ever have a (security) incident, we plan to use the speakers to listen in the corridors (of the school), to find out where the people are and what they're doing. We also have the capability of calling our students into the building from the outside, if it's appropriate or safer."

A smooth installation

The school board found that the installation of BlazeCast in its initial building in 2009 – Shawville's Dr. S. E. McDowell Elementary School – went much smoother than anticipated, in part due to the fact that Benbria can make changes to the system remotely without having to send a technician to the school, other than to install it.

"The people from Benbria listened to the principal, and addressed her and her staff's concerns," says Charron. "The installers stayed late during several nights of the project. They've been back at least three times to solve other hardware issues. The ability to remotely make changes to bell schedules and to monitor speakers have really helped with a smooth transition. We're very happy with the first full-blown install."

A satisfied customer

BlazeCast is now run in four schools at the board in total, including a school that had it installed in April 2010. The board is hoping to put the system in

place in five more of its smaller buildings, and two of its larger elementary schools, by the summer of 2010. In doing so, the Western Québec School Board has become the first school board in Québec to use the BlazeCast hardware and software.

With the IP phone and paging technology now running in some of its schools, the board can now expand or subdivide classrooms, and easily make all of the physical changes to the phone and intercom system in those rooms itself with its own maintenance people – saving it time and money. No longer will the board have to spend up to \$250,000 a year fixing the phone and intercom service.

Benbria has “solved some real problems in our school board,” says Charron. “We’re actually making the investment now, so we’re spending to put in the software and the hardware, but (eventually) we’ll see savings for years and years and years.”

The future of BlazeCast

Charron says he hopes that BlazeCast, once it is set up in all of its schools, will allow the board’s Director General to make a very important morning announcement on the very first day of the school year, which will be made into every classroom of the Western Québec School Board.

“He can talk to every teacher, every student, and wish them a safe and happy school year ... from his office phone,” says Charron. “Benbria will give us the ability (to do that) when we complete the project.”

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