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power to you



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The University of Birmingham is a member of the prestigious Russell Group of research universities with a strong emphasis on science. Founded in 1900 and the first so-called red brick university to gain an official royal charter, it currently has more than 30,000 students and 6,000 staff.

When students at the University started paying tuition fees, their expectations shifted dramatically. In addition to receiving an excellent education at one of the top universities in the United Kingdom, they also want great customer service.

For example, today's students don't expect communication with professors to be limited to the lecture hall. Their familiarity with online technology and desire for instant access to people and information now extends to their peers and professors.

This includes an expectation of immediate responses to email queries. But this is difficult for professors and tutors to provide when many spend little time at their desks.

Professors attending conferences or conducting research out of the country could be potentially out of direct contact for some time, further increasing the need to stay in email touch with students, colleagues and administrators, even when they have limited internet access.

Stay connected

Students also expect first-class facilities and educational experiences. Administrators are relied on to ensure smooth operations and a level of customer service compatible with other more commercial situations. To meet these demands, staff needed to be able to stay connected at all times.

Rob Derbyshire, Head of Telecoms, University of Birmingham, says: “We realised that to attract and retain students, staff members would have to find better, more creative ways to communicate.”

When the University wanted a way to keep the diverse and widespread group of employees connected and better able to meet these high expectations, they sought assistance from their dedicated Vodafone Account Manager.

“Vodafone worked with us to develop an affordable plan to supply BlackBerry® devices to our key staff members. At present, we've issued 165 devices to University staff, but that is increasing all the time. When other colleagues realise how the BlackBerry® makes it easier to get things done, they want one too,” says Rob.

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Continuous availability

With their BlackBerry® handsets, staff can log on to the network to check their email wherever they are, night or day. The initial BlackBerry® programme was so successful that Vodafone expanded the University's offering to include Neverfail, a continuous availability solution, designed to support uninterrupted use.

This detects problems and switches the service over before the system fails or causes connectivity problems for users. It also enables the University of Birmingham telecoms team to upgrade the server infrastructure without disruption to BlackBerry® users. “Now we have more time to spend on strategy and planning,” says Rob.

Vodafone changed the way key staff members of the University interact, improving productivity and both employee and student satisfaction. Staff can quickly and easily connect with colleagues and students, check their calendars and get access to the information they need to be more productive.

Employees enjoy flexibility in the working environment, while students feel more connected to the University and its academic community.

Significant benefits

- Professors and staff respond to student emails quicker and improved responsiveness fosters improved dialogue between students and staff
- Staff can check email and manage calendars at their own convenience, even while out of the office
- BlackBerry® devices pay for themselves in less than a month. Return on investment can be 10 to 15 times the cost of a BlackBerry® device each month
- Calendars are always up to date so staff can monitor their own appointments, even when out of the office
- Telecoms staff experience less pressure to fix problems and spend more time improving services
- The solution saves University telecoms staff approximately 48 hours a year that were previously spent investigating problems
- Productivity has increased with streamlined communications removing many manual tasks and giving conductors more time to spend with customers

