

Exterity Case Study:

THE STANWAY SCHOOL, COLCHESTER

Overview

Television over IP enables full-quality television to be transported over a normal school network, so that extra television cabling is not required. Matthew Stancombe from The Stanway School tells us how pupils and teachers have benefited from the Exterity system installed by RM.

“If someone wants a specific channel to show at a specific time, we get that streamed down the network and they can pick it up. So if you are a History teacher, and want to show a World War 2 documentary, all you have to do is open up the software and the History Channel will be there. So it’s as simple as that!”

Matthew Stancombe, Assistant Head Teacher, The Stanway School



The school

The Stanway School is a mixed comprehensive school near Colchester, Essex, serving approximately 1000 11 to 16 year olds from the surrounding area. The school gained Humanities College status in September 2004. In 2006, 73% of students attained 5 A*-C in GCSE grades, compared to 42% in 2002. This is an incredible achievement and shows how quickly the school has transformed into a centre of excellence.

A huge turnaround

In April 2003, The Stanway School was given permission by the Deputy Prime Minister to sell surplus land for housing development. A grand plan was formed in order to use the land sale money to completely replace some of the old buildings, which were not intended to last into the 21st century. The first and largest stage was completed in April 2006 (see photo), with the second phase underway, due to finish in Summer 2007.

During their last main Ofsted inspection, in 2002, concern was expressed, in the area of ICT. A new post was created and Matthew Stancombe was appointed as the Assistant Head Teacher in April 2004. He came in so that he could make a “real push in terms of ICT” alongside managing some aspects of the new building infrastructure. The challenge was on, both to handle this significant change and to make the most of the opportunities which lay ahead.



The neat solution

Matthew explains that he wanted to “try and provide the school with infrastructure which would take us as far forward as we could with current technology, with a view to what was coming along in the future. It didn’t seem to make sense to fund a separate infrastructure for network, together with a separate infrastructure for television and telephones. I thought, we could provide our entire network, that is data, TV and telephone over the same infrastructure. We already had an IP Office telephone system which could run over the same infrastructure. If I could find TV to run over it as well, that would be even better.”

He had witnessed how The Sixth Form College, Colchester had implemented a system whereby television was streamed onto the network, and was then picked up on any networked computer or on normal televisions cleverly plugged into the network. This proved to be a cost-effective way of providing television without putting extra cable across the whole building, as “the cost of providing the alternative in cabling did not represent value for money.”

“I spoke to a number of companies, and decided to go for Exterity. It suited what we wanted to do; it answered all the problems we might have in a school. For example, all our teachers have laptops, but they are not all major users. If you have a member of staff who wants to watch TV or record, they now can do that in two main ways. They can either show a group through their laptop in the classroom, through a projector or interactive whiteboard, or with an additional bit of technological wizardry, you can plug a standard TV into any network outlet. The great advantage to this was that we did not have worry about where we were going to put outlets for TV. It’s a great solution for TV: the staff can now watch it anywhere!”

It just works


The main parts of the Exterity system are the input boxes which are managed centrally and connected to the television sources. “One is attached to a Sky box, and one which is attached to a terrestrial digital Freeview box. To a user, when you open up the software, you see what channels are available.”

“The key thing I think is that this works. It’s fantastic digital quality. It’s available without degradation in network bandwidth. There are a limited number of channels, but we can pick and choose what channels we provide.”

Embedding into school life

Matthew describes how Exterity will be integrated across the school in the coming months. “More and more teachers are into using new technology. Having Exterity on their laptops is just an extension of that. The fact that the teachers can use TV on their laptop is helpful to a lot of them. For them, it’s just another way of either making their lesson more exciting or showing what they couldn’t show before. Like a lot of people, when you get in your car, you don’t need to know what’s going on, as long as it works.”





“Pupils see it regularly. We have a learning resource area where we sometimes put the news on. During the World Cup, if there was an England match, we would put that on. Pupils don’t have an issue do they... they just take it for granted! Initially, my responsibility was to provide the technology, now it’s the classroom teacher’s responsibility to use that technology appropriately!”

Moving forward

Stanway School has changed out of all recognition in the previous years, but they’re not planning on slowing down yet.” The first phase is to provide it, second is to encourage the teachers to use it. Ultimately, we’ve got to monitor its use, to see how effective it is and inevitably I want to pass on good practice.” The school have many further ideas in applying Exterity’s technology, for example in consolidating modern foreign language learning, a new satellite Exterity TVgateway “will be connected to a satellite dish, to point to Eurosat, to provide language channels.”

Exterity will also be used for community access outside school hours: “We have the fitness centre, we have a special discounted school subscription that allows us to show it. It means that in the evening, when the fitness club starts coming in, they can watch MTV, for example.”

Summarising the benefits of TV-Over-IP, Matthew explains: “This is stunning technology. Every single person who has any knowledge about IT is absolutely blown over by it. It’s worked out brilliantly here. It’s just dead easy, you load up the software, you choose what channel you want, and away it goes!”

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