

## Switch from patchwork to network

BATHURST Regional Council's 18-year-old phone system was powerful but difficult to manage.

It was time for an upgrade, information services manager Peter Fawkes says.

"Towards the end of last year we decided we wanted to install a call centre, and we couldn't do that with the old system, and anyway parts were getting harder and harder to find.

"We had an idea of what features we wanted, so we called for tenders."

The council, located in NSW's central west, services a community of more than 37,000 residents and employs more than 400 staff.

It provides community services including planning, tourism, parks and recreation, water and waste management.

The 15 buildings owned by the council are linked by a city-wide internet protocol metropolitan area network.

"Our team delivers services to the local community around the clock, so we need a telephone system that never misses a beat," Fawkes says.

"We handle hundreds of community requests every day, so efficiency and reliability are critical. Our previous phone system was built from a patchwork of different suppliers over many years. Administering the system and providing user support was complicated."

About 15 companies responded to the tender and the council decided upon a metropolitan area IP telephony network using the Mitel 3300 IP Communications Platform.

Ethan Group was chosen to design the IP-based telephone system, design and install a power-over-ethernet network, and manage the migration and continuing support of the new system.

Fawkes says the council decided to undertake a gradual migration to the new equipment to allow for growth and to improve efficiency in handling customer requests.

"With a metropolitan high-speed IP data network already in place linking all of major sites, converting voice services to IP also allowed us to reduce call costs and more efficiently use the existing IP network."

Fawkes says the system was a little cheaper to run, but had been more expensive to set up than other options.

"It's cheaper if a company uses VoIP for interstate or international calls, but we're just using it in the one city. It gives us more versatility, we can use extension numbers across facilities, and I can use my work extension number at home, for instance."

Fawkes says there were "no real issues" with the two-week installation. The new system is server-based, so it's located in a different room to the old PABX.

"That took a while to rewire. We had to do our homework."

Bathurst Council decided to segment the network to make it easier to manage, but it didn't buy enough switches.

"Luckily, the company had some in stock in Sydney so they came up overnight.

"Planning is critical and it's also important to get your phone company onsite, as well as the company installing the product."

The 300-extension system is now running smoothly at the civic centre at a cost of \$250,000 and will be rolled out across other remote sites over the coming years, as funds become available.

"Each site has its own phone systems or PABXs so it will be good to get them all on the same system. The cost will depend on the intricacies of each site."

The new technology has simplified administration in the IT department, Fawkes says.

Administration is completely web-based, with integrated automatic reporting tools.

"Our previous phone system was difficult to manage," he says. "We administered our entire system from a single dedicated phone handset with a tiny four-line LCD text display.

"Every time someone moved desks, we needed to make physical changes to cabling.

"Our new Mitel IP telephony system has web-based management, and can be managed from any computer.

"Mitel's IP telephony system is extremely easy to use, which means any member of our IT department can now easily manage the phone system."

The new technology has required some staff training.

Bathurst, located about 200km west of Sydney, is Australia's oldest inland settlement.