



**Children First
FLORIDA**
www.scholarshipfunding.org

Overview

Children First Florida (CFF) is a non-profit organisation in Florida, United States, whose goal is to provide private school scholarships to low-income children who are struggling academically, socially, or emotionally in their assigned public school. Thousands of Florida families apply for the scholarship every year, generating significant call volumes to the application processing center.

In 2006, CFF awarded scholarships to over 8,500 children, and was expected to grow to over 13,000 children in the next school year. This growth demanded a phone system that could effectively handle thousands of families calling the processing centre during the peak season.

The organisation had been an early adopter of hybrid IP/Traditional PBX to organise and supplement its ten POTS lines and provide IP capability. Their original hybrid IPPBX software was delivered on an Open Standards Hardware. The previous system was intuitive in some respects, but its evolution towards VoIP was clearly not enough to keep up with what was becoming very real call volume requirements.



Challenge

CFF had the basic infrastructure in place for their telephone system, including ten POTS lines, IP handsets from Linksys, Dell open source server with Digium analog ports, and other standard elements. Given the non-profit status of the organisation, there was the need to adhere to a very limited budget; therefore any reinvestment in hardware would not have been welcomed by CFF's Board of Directors. At the same time however, CFF was dedicated to serving the needs of Florida children and finding ways to meet objectives by expanding their communications capabilities.

There was the immediate need to organise CFF's internal lines to include even the most elementary requirements such as Call Forwarding, Voicemail, On Hold Features and other basics. CFF was also experiencing an excessive monthly expense for ten POTS lines from their local telecommunications provider. Moving these lines to an IP solution would result in significant costs savings for the organisation.

With a staff of fifteen and 13,000 prospective scholarship families, there was the need to ensure that calls were minimised and/or reach their intended party as quickly as possible. The real challenge was to have IVR capabilities that would direct callers to various menus depending on their reasons for calling CFF. Different prompts needed to be designed to address the needs of renewal applicants, new applicants, families checking the status of applications and other types of calls. These prompts needed to answer as many questions as possible or direct the caller to the correct staff member within CFF. Lastly, given Florida's large Spanish-speaking population, there was also the need to have a bilingual IVR.

In addition to the above, CFF needed a way to dynamically track the language preferences of each application family as well as other application details such as missing documents, etc. To meet these requirements, CFF needed a system that enabled them to easily change message prompts and menus, as well as track responses to prompts. Furthermore, such frequent message customization requirements meant that the system needed to be maintainable by CFF's own staff.

Solution

Bicom Systems' PBXware easily integrated with CFF's server and supported the existing handsets. As such, there were only minimal software and support issues to consider. CFF's own internal engineer was confident from previous experience that this would install easily onto the existing HFC standard hardware, scan the network for devices, and be up and running quickly.

Bicom Systems tapped their worldwide experience and training by setting up CFF's IVR to dynamically use Spanish & English in both the custom prompts and the default prompts. Were a caller to select Spanish Language at the initial prompt, then all subsequent messages would be heard in Spanish as the caller's preference would escalate throughout the call.



The PBXware had the greatest impact through the use of CTI (Computer Telephony Integration). Using this technology, CFF was able to create their own CRM to decide what messages would be heard by users and how these messages were revealed. Further, through an IVR response, CFF could confirm that the message had been heard by the caller. Through CFF's own database, it would now be easy to know what application documents were missing and the language preferences of each applicant, allowing CFF to respond accordingly with the most appropriate instructions.

As a helpful addition, OPCOM, Bicom Systems' Operator Panel allowed any pending calls to be received and viewed by CFF staff from the desktop interface. Once the Bicom Systems solution was fully deployed, CFF's costly POTS lines could be scaled back and later eliminated.

Implementation

In April 2007, CFF downloaded PBXware. The PBXware integrated with existing infrastructure as anticipated without issue. Rollout began in July of the same year. The handsets already in place were recognised and, by filling in data to the PBXware template, each user was emailed passwords and experienced no disruption of service.

Bicom System provided expert guidance on the IVR menu to enable a seamless deployment. At time of writing (September 2007), the POTS lines are being decommissioned, all DID's transferred and for less than \$400 per month, CFF has unlimited calls inbound and outbound.

CFF is now able to maintain the system internally and produced an in-house interface to interact with the scholarship database. This allows the system to send informational outbound calls to families in the CFF database using a sound file created in PBXware. This can be seen below:

Results

This year CFF has been able to help 65% more children than last year without a significant increase in operational costs. Furthermore, in key areas such as postal service and telephony they have seen cost reductions.

Internally, CFF staff are better able to organise their working routines than before and schools and students can more easily navigate through the call system to find the resource they need to address their queries.

CFF's ability to self-manage the system allows them to spend more time positively impacting children's lives and benefiting the community at whole. Bicom Systems is very pleased to have played its role in helping achieve such an important contribution.