

Criswell College

Meeting students' and staffs' expectation of Wi-Fi for all

“The new Stellar Wi-Fi system works, it provides solid coverage for all users and doesn't require constant attention... it does what it's supposed to do.”

Rob Merryman, Network Manager

Criswell College is a Christian liberal arts college and divinity school in the greater Dallas, Texas area. Established in 1970, Criswell recognizes the importance of offering Wi-Fi across its campus - not only to students and visitors, but also for faculty to enhance teaching. So to compete in today's higher education space, Criswell invested in a “Stellar” wireless network that is always on for users, and a dream for the IT team.

CHALLENGES

Criswell College has always faced IT infrastructure issues with thick walls (concrete and terra cotta designs) and lack of accessible cabling, going back to the 1950s when most of its three buildings were built. Initially in 2010 when Rob Merryman arrived as the lead point of contact for all things IT, the school didn't have a wireless network, but students and teachers began asking. In response, Rob scraped together some consumer-grade Access Points and created separate wireless networks for students and faculty. Supporting only 150-200 users it created demand and the realization that “we need something better.” Shortly after, Rob invested in an Ubiquiti wireless network and quickly outgrew its capacity and reliability. Thunderstorms and heavy weather would cause an AP to fail every 6-8 months. They also found it couldn't expand or provide coverage through walls.

Rob's Wi-Fi challenges came to a peak in 2017 as the school was designated to host over 2000 users for an annual convention. Rob worked with channel partner Skyhelm to assess what a real Wi-Fi network could do to relieve the issues, and the results have been Stellar. The Alcatel-Lucent OmniAccess® Stellar wireless network is just what Rob needed to deliver reliability, nearly zero maintenance and interoperate with his existing local area network.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Alcatel-Lucent OmniAccess® Stellar 1221 access points
Alcatel-Lucent OmniVista® 2500

WHAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE?

Skyhelm's partnership and approach with a thorough site survey for wireless network requirements, along with ALE's technology, capability and price were what made the difference. Criswell uses a third-party LAN switching vendor and ALE's Stellar is fully interoperable. Additionally, the management capabilities allow Criswell's IT team to oversee the network end-to-end and provide peace of mind.

> TECHNICAL BENEFITS

The Stellar wireless APs have a superior build quality, which unlike the previously-deployed solution, have been rock solid with zero hardware failures since fall 2017. With Stellar, Criswell has experienced zero outages and zero failed APs since fall 2017. And though Criswell has OmniAccess Management software, Rob Merryman commented that he's “...happy it has hardly been needed as the system does what it's supposed to do.”

> FINANCIAL BENEFITS

Criswell is quick to say there is no price that can be measured when dealing with maintenance service headaches when issues come up. Working with business partner Skyhelm, who did a thorough and inquisitive site survey, Criswell was blown away by the price, cooperation and preparation of planning and deployment. The price was good, the technology solid and so was the service.

> USER EXPERIENCE BENEFITS

The words “the Wi-Fi is down” are words of the past on the Criswell campus. There are zero connectivity gaps for mobile users on campus. The Stellar solution is incredibly flexible, allowing for great Wi-Fi connectivity for hundreds of people in the main assembly hall as well as in the classroom. And when there are outdoor gatherings, a strategically placed AP at a window or two provides the coverage needed for the attendees.

Customer Story

MARKET: HIGHER EDUCATION
PROJECT DATE: MARCH 2018

COUNTRY: UNITED STATES
NUMBER OF USERS: 400

COMPANY:
CRISWELL COLLEGE