



**Client:** County Meath Vocational Education Council

**Web Site:** [www.meathvec.ie](http://www.meathvec.ie)

**Client size:** 900 staff, 8000 students

**Country:** Ireland

**Sector:** Education

#### Software and Services

Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2

Microsoft Office Communicator 2007

Microsoft Office Live Meeting

Microsoft Exchange 2010

Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2010

## County Meath VEC uses video conferencing to extend learning choices to all students

*"By choosing a unified communications platform we are able to provide a fully featured distance learning solution that utilises our existing network for high quality video tutorials to all our schools. We can use the same platform to decrease our costs and carbon footprint by reducing staff travel and meeting time by replacing them with video conferences when possible. Very shortly we are planning to replace our landline based telephone system with internet based telephony to make further cost savings. All of these new services are possible with our existing IT network and the unified communications solution; it is just a matter of planning how we make them available to our students and staff."*

Seamus Ryan (Education Officer), County Meath VEC

#### The Client:

County Meath Vocational Education Council is committed to excellence and innovation in the education of young people and adults through the provision of dynamic services delivered by professional staff. It is a local statutory education and training authority and it operates nine schools and colleges, a PLC college, six Youthreach Centres and various other establishments throughout County Meath, Ireland. To deliver these services they published a Strategic Development Plan that includes seven key goals:

- Development of Schools and Centres

- Provide Quality Education
- Partnership
- Information and Communication Technology
- Communication
- Organisational Flexibility
- Staff Development

As a publicly funded body with limited resources it is important that they make the best use of the available funding to achieve and surpass these goals. Many of the goals embrace communication and collaboration between pupils, students, staff and parents located in educational establishments and at home. To enable this Meath VEC has



## The Partner

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Brandon Consulting are a Microsoft Gold Partner who offer Managed IT Support and Professional Services to clients in Ireland and the United Kingdom via 25+ staff operating from offices in Dublin and Galway. The Managed IT Support Team consists of helpdesk based in Dublin with field engineers located in Galway and Dublin. They provide a proactive support framework utilising remote agents on all endpoint devices for monitoring and also security patching and antivirus.

The Professional Services Team is broken into a number of groups with expertise in different areas. All the engineers are Microsoft Certified who then take additional certifications relevant to their area of specialisation. This team provides implementation services for Dell Professional Services under a global infrastructure consulting agreement as well as working with Microsoft Consulting Services on large projects.

In July 2010 Brandon Consulting were named the '2010 Outstanding Microsoft Voice Partner in EMEA' in recognition of their achievements in implementing and supporting numerous Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2 projects in Ireland.

Brandon Consulting are the only Irish Microsoft Gold partner that fully understands how to enable enterprise voice telephony functionality to maximise cost savings associated with your telecommunications bill.

decided to develop and implement a Microsoft unified communications strategy that makes best use of their existing ICT investment in both hardware and software.

## The Challenge

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Meath VEC wants to provide the widest range of courses across all its locations to as many potential students as possible. However, as some of these courses are specialised and have a limited number of enrolments, it is not viable in terms of available staff and funding to physically provide a traditional tutor-led classroom based learning environment at all the locations where there is demand for a specific course. What was needed was a solution that would allow any number of students at any location to interact with the course tutor as though they were in the same classroom. This solution must be able to run over the existing LAN/WAN and broadband connections that link all the locations with minimal additional costs.

## The Solution

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Meath VEC is committed to a Microsoft-centric ICT strategy due to their long standing collaboration with leading edge learning support systems through the Partners in Learning programme. Via their Microsoft Campus Agreement they have access to Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2, Microsoft Exchange 2010, Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2010 and Enterprise Client Access Licenses (eCALs). These three integrated server products enable a complete Unified Communications and Collaboration platform which includes video calling and conferencing. This functionality forms the basis of the solution to the challenge above.

To permit as many students as possible to receive tuition at their local school, college or even from home, Meath VEC decided to adopt a distance learning methodology. This allows for the teacher giving the class to do so from their usual location, but instead of students having to be in the same physical classroom, they can participate

via a video link from anywhere with internet access.

By adding a basic webcam and speakers to existing personal computers and laptops, students can actively participate in lectures without having to travel to a central location. Both the teacher and the students can see and hear each other as well as being able to share content such as presentations, documents and web pages. The teacher can take control of the students desktop if required and there is an interactive whiteboard for brainstorming sessions. All the lectures can be recorded and made available on the Meath VEC intranet so that students who could not attend the live lecture can catch up in their own time.

## The Future

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This distance learning solution only utilises the video conferencing functionality in Microsoft OCS. Now that the platform has been installed Meath VEC are looking to rollout additional solutions in future phases to help them meet the goals in their Strategic Development Plan. These solutions will concentrate on decreasing costs and increasing efficiencies. The next expansion to the distance learning solution is to allow students to participate from their own homes using their own computers and internet connections. A study is under way to see how the existing hardware based telephony infrastructure can be replaced with the telephony functionality in Microsoft OCS. This will remove the cost of supporting the existing systems and telephone lines.