



Through Hurricanes and Pandemics, Nicholls State University Stays Connected in the Cloud with Avaya Cloud Office



Nicholls State University

www.nicholls.edu

Louisiana-based Nicholls State University was considering Avaya Cloud Office® by RingCentral as the contract for its legacy communications system, installed in 2003, neared expiration. It wasn't long after this time of deliberation that the COVID-19 pandemic hit, pushing the entire university off campus for the first time in its 74 years of existence. "Remote work capabilities were never a consideration for us," said Slade Besson, who has been serving as Director of Telecommunications and Networking at Nicholls State for 22 years. "For as long as I have been here, we have been an on-site facility." A free trial of Avaya Cloud Office turned full implementation after the university saw drastic improvements in productivity and user experience with estimated annual cost savings of \$60,000.

Trial Turned Full Implementation

Avaya and its partner, ConvergeOne, offered Nicholls State free licenses to Avaya Cloud Office to get through its transition to remote work, which proved to be a big success. "We gave those licenses to some of the most technologically challenged people in our organization who had to go remote. IT couldn't go and install the application on their devices," Besson explained. "They were sent a link with online instructions, which we hoped they could follow."

CHALLENGES

- Remote and mobility challenges (the university had no remote work capabilities prior to Avaya Cloud Office)
- Needed greater agility to adapt and respond to unprecedented events (specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricane Ida)
- Faculty and staff did not want to use personal cell phone numbers for remote work, nor did the University want to blur the lines of personal and professional communications
- Lack of NG911 compliance

VALUE CREATED

- Transitioning to the cloud supports the next phase evolution and ensures it would always be operationally capable in the face of unexpected events (Avaya Cloud Office was crucial for keeping geographically dispersed employees connected during the pandemic and Hurricane Ida in August of 2021.)
- An easy to use, work-from-anywhere solution enables calls, messaging, meetings, and more collaboration between the university's faculty, staff, and students while always maintaining professionalism.
- The university has estimated annual savings of approximately \$60,000 by transitioning to Avaya Cloud Office, with further potential savings by eliminating licenses to redundant collaboration applications.
- Nicholls State is now compliant with Kari's Law and Ray Baum's Act

They did and easily so, to the point where one staff member (who is endearingly known for being less tech savvy) emailed Besson 15 minutes later to tell him she was already done with the system's setup. With March being the university's heavy recruiting season for the upcoming academic year, employees couldn't be bogged down by a complicated communications system. The ease of installation and use of Avaya Cloud Office spoke volumes, and that was just the start of the value the solution would provide. When Besson calculated circuit charges, PRI charges, maintenance, and other costs, he estimated Avaya Cloud Office would generate annual savings of approximately \$60,000. When the university's CFO saw what the product could do, as well as the cost savings, they decided to officially move forward.

Uninterrupted Operations, Even When Mother Nature Stepped In

Peak intensity neared landfall in Louisiana with up to 150 mph winds, leaving Nicholls State without power for nine days. Avaya Cloud Office kept faculty and staff reliably connected with one tool for seamless communication when they were scattered throughout the state, as well some who were located out-of-state.

"Thankfully, before the hurricane, we had enough of Avaya Cloud Office built out with temporary DIDs so that all our extensions were working," said Besson. HR, admissions, financial aid, IT, maintenance, and school executives were able to quickly install the Avaya Cloud Office app on their mobile phones to keep operations going without having to share their personal cell numbers. "That was huge for us. Everybody knows their four-digit extensions and can look them up easily. Employees who evacuated to places such as Texas could connect with employees in Louisiana using their four-digit extension as if they were on campus. All we needed was cell coverage."

On the note of Mother Nature, Avaya Cloud Office also fits well into the university's green initiatives. The transition from legacy on-premises communications to cloud communications enables Nicholls State to reduce its carbon footprint by eliminating decades-old servers and generators while being able to repurpose the large room where its servers once resided.

Game-changing Security, Simplicity, and Mobility

Once employees saw how easy it was to use Avaya Cloud Office and that they wouldn't have to share their personal contact information, the floodgates opened for compelling use cases. As more staff and students returned to campus, Nicholls State continued to use Avaya Cloud Office for always-on



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communication. Marine biologists out in the bayous, athletic directors out in the field, and recruiters who are always on-the-go can be easily reached using four-digit dialing. Single sign-on simplifies system use further, enabling faculty and staff to use their "MyNichollsID" to log into their software app or mobile app.

The university's police department especially benefits from the ease of four-digit dialing. When an investigator is called in to examine an incident, they understandably don't want to provide their personal cell number. This added travel time to go back and forth to their office phone to speak with students and collect and verify information. Using Avaya Cloud Office, they can call from their dedicated DID on their cell phone or a laptop through the app – shielding personal contact information – and talk to students to verify information anytime, anywhere. The system's automatic call recording feature has also been beneficial for these legal investigations. Police can start recordings at the moment they're needed, and Avaya Cloud Office automatically transcribes these recordings for legal use. They can then be stored to keep on record.

Avaya Cloud Office also provides compliance with Kari's Law and Ray Baum's Act, which its legacy communications system did not. These laws require multi-line phone systems (like those found in schools, hotels, and offices) to enable direct dial to 911, and that those calls include a detailed "dispatchable location" to decrease response time. By moving away from its outdated communications system to Avaya Cloud Office, Nicholls State has become NG911-enabled with the power to provide greater location accuracy and multimedia – and at a lower cost.

Exploration with Innovation in Mind

Avaya Cloud Office allows users to go beyond four-digit dialing if desired with capabilities like video conferencing, text messaging, and in-app messaging that help step-up productivity, speed decision making, and share information more quickly. Collaboration can be further streamlined with built-in screensharing, document storing, and task tracking. The university is exploring these options, which would further reduce costs by eliminating licenses for redundant collaboration applications.

Students can also use Avaya Cloud Office to easily communicate with staff and faculty. For example, they can text the DID number for admissions, financial aid, and other university departments and the message will be sent to that department's receptionist. Departments can also send text messages to students and prospects (i.e., "Thank you for touring Nicholls State University! Check out more information here [LINK]"). Prospective students can text recruiters and vice versa. Professors and students can text as well, including group text messaging for classes. All that's needed are students' cell phone numbers for a professor to send a mass notification using their four-digit extension. Nicholls State draws a strong line between business and personal communications, which makes four-digit communication perfect. If a professor doesn't have the Avaya Cloud Office mobile app, they will get an email of text messages they receive.

The university has also expanded its use of Avaya Cloud Office to support a small-scale contact center within its financial aid department. Using the system, the department can provide incoming callers with an automatic greeting and a simple IVR ("Press 1 for financial aid assistance. Press 2 for scholarships"). Three students work as "agents" that handle call volume, and the school's Financial Aid Director can easily control recordings without IT assistance.

During a time of mass disruption, Avaya Cloud Office enabled Nicholls State University to digitally transform from 20-year-old server racks to a flexible, integrative, compliant, all-in-one cloud communications solution. "You can't put a price on better experiences. Avaya Cloud Office has changed the game for us. We're excited to continue improving and innovating with the system," said Besson.

Besson volunteers as a Director on the Avaya International User Group (IAUG) Board of Directors. His history and knowledge of Avaya makes him a perfect candidate for the role. "Meeting with other Avaya customers and discussing trends sparks ideas for myself and others. These connections enrich both my personal and professional development." Besson regularly encourages others to get involved, as well.

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About ConvergeOne

ConvergeOne is a proven, services led cloud and applications solution provider that utilizes its intellectual property and unique methodologies to create value for customers and develop progressive solutions that connect people with purpose. Over 14,000 enterprise and mid-market customers trust ConvergeOne to achieve their business outcomes with cloud, collaboration, enterprise networking, data center and cybersecurity solutions. Our investments in cloud infrastructure and professional and managed services provide transformational opportunities for customers to achieve financial and operational benefits with leading technologies. Our 2021 NPS of 80, placing us in the World Class category for the fourth consecutive year, is a testament to our ability to provide customers with the highest level of customer satisfaction, responsiveness and expertise. ConvergeOne has partnerships with more than 300 global industry leaders, including Dell Technologies, AWS, Avaya, Cisco, IBM, Genesys, and Microsoft to customize specific business outcomes. We deliver solutions with a total lifecycle approach, including strategy, design and implementation with professional, managed and support services. ConvergeOne holds more than 5,600 technical certifications across hundreds of engineers throughout North America, including three Customer Success Centers. More information is available at [convergeone.com](https://www.convergeone.com).



About Nicholls State University

Nicholls State University, located in Thibodaux, La., is an accredited regional university with a diverse population of about 6,500 traditional and nontraditional students. Since first opening its doors in 1948, Nicholls has been the only university serving the Bayou Region. The family-oriented campus offers more than 60 degree programs, 85 student organizations and 17 Division I athletic teams.



About Avaya

Businesses are built on the experiences they provide and every day millions of those experiences are built by Avaya (NYSE:AVYA). For over one hundred years, we've enabled organizations around the globe to win—by creating intelligent communications experiences for customers and employees. Avaya builds open, converged and innovative solutions to enhance and simplify communications and collaboration—in the cloud, on premise, or a hybrid of both. To grow your business, we're committed to innovation, partnership, and a relentless focus on what's next. We're the technology company you trust to help you deliver Experiences that Matter.

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