



## ABINGDON

The Abingdon Foundation provides independent education for boys from 4 to 18 years

## 750 year old boarding school rates CommuniGate Pro combined communications solution as '12 out of 10'

Abingdon is a leading independent day and boarding school serving 1,050 boys who range from four to 18 years of age. Situated on a 35 acre site in the centre of Abingdon, just south of Oxford, the school combines the very best in academic standards, music, sport and the arts. It was founded by the Benedictine monks of Abingdon Abbey, and evidence for its existence dates back to the building of St. Nicolas's church as the first schoolroom, somewhere between 1121 and 1184.



The character that makes Abingdon School so distinctive is a subtle synthesis of values, traditions, personalities, places, attitudes and activities. It became fully independent after the ending of the Direct Grant System in 1975 and has continued to grow ever since, merging with Abingdon Preparatory School in 1998 to form the Abingdon Foundation as it is today.

### Secure communication is key



The welfare of the 1,000+ boys is of paramount importance to the academic and administrative staff at Abingdon School. Beyond the teaching side of their responsibility is of course the day to day issues which looking after a large number of full time boarders presents. One of these is to ensure that they are able to communicate with each other throughout the school, and with their parents and friends at home in a simple, yet safe and secure manner.

Part of this requirement has been the development of a school-wide email system which can be used not only by staff as part of their normal working day, but also by pupils. David Haworth, Head of ICT for the school, explains further:

"Having previously used an external company for our email services, we had come to a point where we knew we needed more functionality. But on top of that, to ensure maximum security, flexibility and integration with our existing systems, we also wanted something in-house where we had hands-on control. It needed to be future proof and stable, as well as being a system that we could build the way we wanted it, not someone else's solution. I chose CommuniGate Pro because we had used an earlier version of the software in the past and we were sure it would do everything that we needed it to."

In March 2007 David contacted GAP Internet Communications, who are CommuniGate's distributor and business partner in the UK and Ireland. They supplied and implemented the system, which is an award-winning combined communication solution for email, Instant Messaging and VoIP. CommuniGate Pro provides a full set of features but is also simple to administer, making it ideal for small to medium-sized organisations like Abingdon School. GAPIC also provided their own professional services to implement and test the system during the Summer holidays.

## Cross-platform capability

A key part of the decision-making process was the requirement for whatever system David chose to work effectively on a Macintosh server, as Abingdon School are predominantly Mac-based. However, as some staff do use PCs it needed to be able to work with these also, and CommuniGate Pro fits the bill perfectly here as it supports all platforms, including Windows, Linux and Unix as well. David continues:

"We needed a system which would work as efficiently with Macs as it did with other operating systems. CommuniGate Pro does just that, and we have not had to do anything clever with it to make it work, it just does!



We have also taken a standard webmail skin and customised this to look not only like our website, but also to look like Apple's Mail application which the majority of our staff were already used to using. By giving the webmail screens our own style we have integrated them seamlessly into the overall commercial identity of the school to give a uniform look and feel, as well as giving users a familiar environment to work in. It definitely helps people to get used to using the new system if it feels familiar, and this has worked very successfully."

Currently there are around 1,300 users on the system, most of whom use the webmail. There are a handful which still use Apple's Mail, but these are gradually being migrated onto our webmail solution from CommuniGate Pro. In addition to this, there are around 15 users on the business and administrative side of the school who use Outlook, and the system is able to support these users as well, completely removing the need for their own Exchange server.

## A solution for now and for the future

The CommuniGate Pro solution has now been up and running since that start of September 2007 and is performing well, providing tailored webmail and Internet access for the boys, as well as webmail and Outlook-based email facilities for over 150 staff. It also gives David the ability to view detailed logs which give him a breakdown of all activity within the system. An added advantage is also an overall lower total cost of ownership, as the system needs far less hardware to run on, which in turn reduces maintenance and administration costs.



To complete the solution, GAPIC also provided anti-Spam and anti-virus software, to ensure that the CommuniGate Pro solution is not only safe and secure for the boys to use, but is also protected from external threats. Although Abingdon School are only using the email functionality at the moment, they also have the ability to add Voice over IP communications and fully-secure Instant Messaging at any time via a simple license key. David concludes:

"CommuniGate Pro is now our only email system and we have banned all other types of email during the school day to encourage everyone to use the school solution. In terms of our opinion of the product itself, if you asked me for a score out of 10 I'd have to say 12 as it's very intuitive and easy to use. We had a half day hands on training session and after that it was very simple to operate.

Spam filtering has always been a major headache for us, and the reason for many complaints with communication solutions we have used in the past. Our new solution with CommuniGate Pro is completely hands-off for users and is very effective indeed.

The additional calendar management, IM and VoIP functionality were also a key part of our decision-making process when it comes to planning for the future. We intend to upgrade our phone system in about two years time and we want to integrate CommuniGate Pro into this project. We will also use the Instant Messaging as well, probably for IT support in the first instance. We are already sharing calendars and address books and many of the boys and staff are already using the web file-storage provided on the server to access their work at home too!

We worked collaboratively with GAPIC throughout the whole project and kept in regular contact. They gave us lots of pointers on how to set it up in the right way and if there was anything they didn't know, they were always able to find out. They have been absolutely brilliant."

UK  
GAP Internet Communications  
211 Piccadilly  
London  
W1J 9HF  
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7917 2909  
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7917 2990  
Email: [communiGate@gapic.co.uk](mailto:communiGate@gapic.co.uk)

Headquarters  
655 Redwood Highway, Suite  
275  
Mill Valley, CA 94941 U.S.A.  
US Tel: 800 262 4722  
Intl: +1 415 383 7164  
Fax: +1 415 383 7461  
Email: [sales@communiGate.com](mailto:sales@communiGate.com)

Europe  
CommuniGate Systems  
Kreitstr. 5  
86926 Greifenberg/Munich  
Germany  
Tel: +49.8192.99733-0  
Fax: +49.8192.99733-29  
Email: [europe@communiGate.com](mailto:europe@communiGate.com)

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