Camera Corner Connecting Point

Driven by technology, powered by creativity

After years of having an on-premise server, the Birch Creek Music Performance Center moved to Azure, a cloud platform from Microsoft. With this move came flexibility and continuity.

Birch Creek Music Performance Center, founded in 1976 in Egg Harbor, Wis., is a nonprofit organization that works to engage professionals in the music industry with promising young music students. The center offers a residential program during the summer and has a staff of six who work year-round.

Challenge

Mona Christensen, executive director of The Birch Creek Music Performance Center, joined Birch Creek five years ago. In 2019, she realized the center's four-year-old server was becoming an issue, and was costing the center $1,200 per year in extended warrantees. In addition, the outdated server caused the center to be reactive instead of proactive to any issues and offered limited flexibility in work-from-home due to the slow internet at the center.

"I realized for the cost to replace the server, we could be in the cloud," said Christensen.

Solution

Christensen reached out to Camera Corner Connecting Point to discuss moving to the cloud and found many advantages to being on a cloud platform versus on-prem.

"We didn't want to hire a staff person to be responsible for IT because you're limited to their knowledge," Christensen said. "With as fast as these things are changing, without constant development and training, there's no way someone can stay on the front end of it unless they're staying up with the trends."

Knowing the limitations of a singular IT staff person, Christensen engaged CCCP staff to assess Birch Creek's current environment, ensuring the solution fit their exact needs and specifications, as well as migrate to all their data to the cloud.

"We had four to five people from CCCP working together in the migration process," Christensen said. "It was a full week of dedicated time for that team, but they dug deep and it was awesome. It was so great to have people who know what we need to do at industry standard now, rather than what worked two to three years ago."

Little did anyone know, a year later a pandemic would hit the globe, causing non-essential businesses to shut down and close their doors for an undetermined amount of time. However, because Birch Creek's system is now operating in the cloud, the staff was able to continue working and operating as if they were still in the office.

"After one year, it's been relatively bullet proof," Christensen said. "We can get on wherever we are, whatever we're doing, no matter what device. We're super connected."

In addition to the ability to be flexible in where they work and being able to continue doing business as usual while not in the office, moving to the cloud allowed Christensen to get ahead of any technical issues.

"Before we were always behind the eight-ball," Christensen said. "We would have to call dispatch for emergency situations because we'd update something, causing something else to break, and wait for someone to come up and fix the issue."

Additionally, Azure provides greater security for Birch Creek. Previously, patches had to be done by a CCCP engineer on the old server. With Azure, the updates are automatic and provided to users to ensure there aren't any security holes that could be leaking.

With moving to Azure, CCCP's engineers work remotely every four to six weeks to maintain their environment. With this cadence, Birch Creek avoids emergency network issues and can get ahead of issues because of automatic updates.

> "It's great to have someone dedicated to us, so that when you call dispatch, it goes right to our engineers. They know your organization and your business."

"It's great to have someone dedicated to us, so that when you call dispatch, it goes right to our engineers," Christensen said. "They know your organization and your business, and now that we are in the Cloud, they're able to do things remotely. Sometimes they need to come on-site, but most often they can get into our system remotely and do what they need to."

Another way Birch Creek is utilizing the cloud is with a Thin Client solution from iGel. This solution has allowed them to utilize older computers without issue because the system is operating within the cloud rather than on the hardware itself.

"By using iGel we're able to save money by using our current old desktops that serves as a conduit to our Azure environment to operate in the cloud," Christensen said. "When a desktop fails, all I have to do is purchase a thin client for $150-$200, rather than purchasing a new desktop for $500-600."

In addition to utilizing Azure, Birch Creek has adopted Microsoft Teams for communication and collaboration. This system has allowed them to continue staff meetings, one-on-one meetings, continuous communication via chat, and so much more.

"You could be on one end of the country to the other, and it doesn't matter because you can still collaborate. Things are working great."

"We're able to do all our communication remotely," Christensen said. "You could be on one end of the country to the other, and it doesn't matter because you can still collaborate. Things are working great."

Result

Overall, moving to Azure, iGel and Microsoft Teams provided flexibility for Birch Creek to continue operating even through a pandemic, the ability to continue communicating seamlessly, as well as operate more efficiently and effectively for day-to-day operations.