

CASE STUDY

# Mountaineers Scale the Cloud



Eastern Oregon University (EOU) was founded in 1929 as a teachers’ college. Now a thriving regional university, EOU is also a nationally recognized leader in online education. More than half of the current student population is enrolled in EOU’s online and other flexible learning programs. With 16 centers spread across the state, EOU brings affordable, accessible education to students throughout Oregon and beyond.

**At a Glance**

A nationally recognized leader in online education, 42% of EOU students are enrolled in online courses with an additional 33% participating in a mixed online/traditional education experience. EOU currently supports 23 Bachelor’s degree and partnership programs and 4 Master’s degree programs. EOU focuses on each individual student; its average class size is 30 and the university extended more than \$34M in financial aid to students in 2010–11 alone.

- **School Mascot:** Mountaineer
- **Current Enrollment:** 4,157
- **Faculty/Staff:** 250

EOU’s main campus is located just east of the Blue Mountains in La Grande, OR and is approximately 259 miles east of Portland, OR.



## Background

Like many in the Higher Education community, EOU had a legacy telephone system that was stuck in the 20th century. Their aging on-premises PBX experienced frequent outages and required regular—and expensive—maintenance. The amount of time the IT staff spent administering the telephone was extensive.

In addition, the member of the IT staff who had long provided the in-house expertise to manage and maintain the phone system left, and with him the capability to perform much of the self-service system configuration and management. As a result, when outages occurred (and with their antiquated equipment they occurred frequently) EOU was at the mercy of the service provider for any and all relief. Even with a costly annual maintenance contract in place, average time-to-resolution could stretch across multiple days.

Further, analog phones (650+ of the them) were no longer serviceable by the vendor and couldn't deliver the kind of communications features the university wanted to extend to its campus community. Many were quickly becoming completely nonfunctional. Without available parts to repair them, finding new phones that were still compatible with the existing system was becoming more and more of a challenge.

Bryan Pearson, Systems Administrator at EOU said of the situation, "Budget and staffing challenges at EOU require us to continually think about maximizing resources. One area that was not cost effective was the overly complicated, antiquated, and costly infrastructure needed to maintain our on-premises telephone system."



## Solution

EOU needed a new solution. Hoping to control the cost of upgrading, they reached out to their existing service provider to get a quote for simply updating their equipment. The cost of what they considered to be a basic upgrade, as it did not include any new features or services, was staggering.

Said Pearson, "As we thought about it further we felt confident that either reducing or completely eliminating on-campus telephone equipment was the right direction for EOU. As we continued to investigate our options, the idea of a hosted VoIP solution continued to grow in popularity within our IT department."

The IT department went shopping. Unsure of what was available in the marketplace, they reached out to a variety of communications service providers and researched all available solutions—hosted and premises-based. That was when they were introduced to Jive Communications, Inc.

From the onset, Jive offered a solution that addressed EOU's core concerns:

- **System Administration:** Jive's Hosted solution would eliminate the need for the campus IT staff to maintain the telephone system. Any moves, adds, and changes and other required setting configurations could be accomplished quickly and easily (and without extensive training) within an intuitive browser-based portal.
- **Features:** Voicemail-to-email, virtual faxing, free conference bridges, and unlimited local and long distance calling were just the beginning of the feature upgrades available with a Jive solution.
- **Cost:** Jive's all-inclusive, per-seat pricing was simple and predictable. All system features, for all system users were included at no additional cost.
- **Reliability:** Jive offered industry-leading up-time, redundant systems, and increased system reliability and security.

## REACHING REAL UNDERSTANDING

While EOU was impressed with what Jive had to offer, initiating a comprehensive, end-to-end deployment seemed risky. It was also going to be a difficult sell for their project stakeholders. Like many decision makers, their exposure to VoIP technology was limited and skewed toward the negative.

EOU decided to run a small test pilot of the Jive solution. With six Jive phones over a six month period, they put Jive's promises to the test. They tested Jive features in a

real-world, everyday context. They tracked monthly costs, including hard costs like actual service billing as well as soft costs like system support time. They surveyed users about call quality and ease of use.

The IT staff asked questions. Wanting to understand the architecture and how it would impact their call quality, they met with Jive engineers. They reached out to competing vendors to compare costs, features, and value.

“The pilot,” Pearson explains, “allowed us to take a complete package, including estimated savings, demo phones, example reports, screenshots, and live management demos to our upper administration for buy-off.”

## THE PROOF THEY NEEDED

The results of EOU’s testing were clear. The Jive solution delivered on all of its promises. Features increased productivity and were easy to use. Voicemail-to-email and virtual faxing were two of the most important features, ensuring users never missed a communication by unifying all messages in one email inbox window.

Pearson related, “Beyond just cost, Jive’s intuitive management interface and extensive feature set really set it apart from the competition.”

Support and management man-hours also dropped to almost zero. The monthly service costs were really the only system operating costs they had to worry about. Users reported no noticeable decrease in call quality. Where system downtime had previously been a regular part of day-to-day operations, no major outages or connectivity issues were experienced.

## INITIATING FULL-SCALE DEPLOYMENT

After completing the pilot, EOU was ready to deploy a comprehensive Jive solution. While doing so meant breaking step with a larger state-wide college IT consortium, they were confident in the benefits they experienced in the pilot.

Implementing the Jive Hosted solution went very smoothly, from porting existing numbers to configuring devices, dial plans, and users. Pearson remarked, “Working with the Jive implementation and technical groups well ahead of the final migration made transition-day

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**BRYAN PEARSON**  
EASTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY  
SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR



much less stressful. We knew the technical setup and networking portion were completed during our pilot and during the pre-implementation process, so we simply planned and announced the changes to our staff and faculty.”

Getting users up to speed on new tools and features was also easy. Links to online Jive tutorials and other training resources integrated directly into the end-user portal, dramatically shortened the learning curve. “Communication with end-users was a huge part of making our migration successful,” said Pearson. “Weekly emails to campus staff and faculty, clear timelines on the website, training videos and links to Jive supplied wiki and training materials proved invaluable for EOU. Our users were well informed and generally excited about the migration.”

## BENEFITS OF MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

EOU has been running 100% Jive with no on-campus equipment since summer 2013 and hasn’t looked back.

The impact for the IT department was immediate. Says Pearson, “The man-hours required to maintain our telephone system have dropped to almost zero, and overall cost of service has dropped considerably. We were able to reallocate a significant portion of our budget to other urgent needs compared to what we would have had to pay to keep our previous on-premise telephone system up to date.”

For the campus community, the change has been positive as well. Pearson notes, “We constantly hear positive feedback on the voicemail-to-email functionality, fax-to-email, virtual fax, simple conference calls, modern handsets, along with the call clarity and self-managed options such as Find Me/Follow Me. Our staff and faculty are finally in the 21st century.”

In evaluating the cost of transition to the Jive solution, EOU is confident they made the right choice. The total cost to just maintain their existing system, including all associated soft costs (e.g., maintenance, labor costs, outage costs, etc.) was substantially more and the benefits drastically less than the upgrade to their new Jive system and services.

## DON'T WAIT

EOU’s advice to the Higher Education community is simple: Don’t wait.



Pearson recommends putting the service provider to the test. “Utilize the demo process to the fullest extent,” says Pearson, “Put the web interface through its paces. Really investigate reporting and verify it provides the details and information your organization requires. Migrate several members of your telephone management team to the system to fully vet call quality and feature set.”

In recommending Jive, Pearson concludes, “we reviewed a number of competitors, both on-premises and hosted VoIP providers and Jive was the clear winner. The simplicity and ease with which we could manage the entirety of our telephone system with Jive was amazing.”