

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interview on behalf of Qwest

Joe Gieri

Central NM Community College

Executive Director Office of Informa

Last updated: 2008 Oct 21



Product(s): QMOE: Unknown
Industry: Education

1. Business need

"My name's Joe Gieri and I work for Central New Mexico Community College. Central New Mexico Community College is the largest community college in the State of New Mexico. We're in the Albuquerque metro area and we have five campuses, and soon one in Rio Rancho.

When we started looking for a solution, we were running into problems with reliability. We knew that we had to scale our network; we were out of bandwidth. We had some very important applications we were trying to run over our wide area; it was our ERP for the college, our student information system, as well as a learning management system that was experiencing huge growth at the time. So this was delivery of education to the classroom that it was impacting. That drove our need. When we were looking at what we had in place, we had to make some changes and we had to make them quickly. We were in trouble; we were out of bandwidth.

For us, support is always an issue. We have a limited network staff; I have approximately four people that I dedicate to network support, so running people around from campus to campus is not my idea of a good support model. We need something that was just reliable; something that we weren't having to deploy staff on on a regular basis."

2. Evaluation & selection

"When we go out to procurement for anything, because we're a public entity, we go through an RFP process. So what we did is we put together our criteria, which we knew right away we needed increased bandwidth; we needed something that was scalable; we absolutely had to have something that was reliable; and two other components: Simplified management because of the limited staff I have, and affordable because we are a public entity and a community college, so the bottom line is an important thing to us. What we do is we put together the criteria on these RFPs; we put them out and we let people propose to us solutions.

When we went through our process, our process at CNM is we have an evaluation team that looks over the criteria, we assign points, and by virtue of that, we're able to make an award to whomever."

3. Why Qwest?

"When we originally started looking into this, we were made aware of the new technology that was available through the QMOE service. We knew, for us, that total cost of ownership was a huge issue. We look at hardware, we look at support, we look at scalability--those kinds of questions come up with us regularly and we have to be able to deploy solutions quickly most of the time, and most of the time our classrooms aren't willing to wait; they need them, and they need them by tomorrow. So that's kind of the business model we have to support.

From previous experience, we knew that Qwest was a service provider that would meet the needs of our total cost of ownership through service and support. They respond quickly and are able to help us whenever we have issues inside of CNM. They're a good business partner, and that's what helped drive our decision in choosing Qwest."

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4. The implementation/installation

"Qwest dropped off the circuit at our doorstep and our technicians were able to go in, hook it up to existing network equipment, and we had service, and it was simply that easy. We have five campuses we were deploying to; we didn't have to do all five of these campuses simultaneously--we were able to deliver one campus at a time and we had a steady flow of service during that whole time.

The issues we experienced in the deployment really related to the fiber buildout. We ran into some problems with contractors that were installing fibers up to our doorstep, but once the delivery--the handoff of the fiber--was complete, then it was us, my staff, working with Qwest's staff, and the deployment at that point went very smooth. We did not have any problems with that. It was a simple hand off, connect, a few tests, and it was up and running."

5. Overview of solution

"We've deployed five QMOE circuits, one to each of our five campuses; the circuits were 100-megabit bandwidth. At this time, we are currently running just data services over these QMOE circuits."

6. Business/IT environment

"Central New Mexico Community College is the largest community college in the state of New Mexico. We have five campuses and we're soon to have one extra in Rio Rancho. We're growing. As far as our network is concerned, we have five QMOE circuits; we have 20,000 Ethernet ports and 450 fiber circuits, so we're busy. We have a growing network at CNM.

Beyond that, we started looking at some of the classrooms and network rooms that we serve from CNM, and growing technology as well. We're adding new technology all the time. I've been in the IT industry for years--20+ years now--and I've never had a technology--an evolving technology environment--like I've had at CNM. The projects are all the time and it's a steady flow. We've got an appetite for technology at this community college."

7. Customer service

"Service with our account rep has been excellent; that's one of the many reasons why we looked at moving forward with the QMOE solution from Qwest. We have an account rep that's very good about responding to us. We pick up the phone, we call, we meet, we talk. My account rep and I actually even work out together, so I have a good relationship with this person and I'm confident, too, if it wasn't the person that I work with, it would be anybody from Qwest because there's been other times when I've called up people from Qwest and we just work through issues or questions. They're a good technology partner.

We depend on the competency of the business partners we use. The staff that I have--generally, I have a pretty frequent turnover in staff, so one of the challenges I have is I will spend a lot of time and dollars training people, getting them up to speed, and I'm working in an environment that generally people do a lot of moving around from business to business. Sometimes I find myself as being a training ground for the corporate sector. But the good news is that when I pick up the phone and when I have a partner that I have trust in and have to be able to work with, I have to know that these people on the other end of the phone are people that have knowledge, complete knowledge, and understanding of their products and they understand our environment as well. I depend on that when I'm working with my business partners, so this was a big reason why, and a very important reason why, we moved forward with this service.

Bottom line is the service works. We have had--up until approximately a month ago, I would have been able to

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answer this question and say 'There have been no problems. None. Nothing. No reasons to call; it just works.' However, about a month ago we had a problem, and it was kind of interesting working through this because I think what had happened is because we never had to work with a problem in our QMOE service, we weren't exactly sure where to call, and when we called the Qwest team, what I found kind of astonishing is that they haven't had to deal with a problem with the QMOE service, either. So it was kind of interesting, what we had--it was a learning experience for both of us. Basically, what we saw is that my staff had to learn the right numbers to call and Qwest teams had to kind of coordinate and figure out 'No, we've got a QMOE problem. How are we gonna fix it on this end?' Once we ironed those out, it was very interesting to see the level of communications that occurred between my staff and Qwest, and really what I saw was a camaraderie and teaming through resolving the issue. It's not that the issue took a long time to resolve; it was a matter of making sure we were bringing the right people to the table to resolve the problem."

8. Non-financial benefits

"The benefits we experienced right away with deploying this QMOE solution was we experienced reliability. Secondly, and right on top of that, was bandwidth. This was huge. So what we were experiencing is a very smooth delivery of these courseware to each of the classrooms at our campuses. The instant relief I experienced right away was at my help desk. I wasn't getting the phone calls that I was getting in the past. Silent lines in an IT department is something that's very solid to me; that means no news is good news; it means we're doing things right. So that was some of the immediate benefits that we experienced from the QMOE services.

First thing I heard was from our distance learning director, then our institutional media research department, basically were telling me 'Wow, what a difference. We're seeing the difference right now.' And that was music to my ears because once they're able to get to it, they're--typically what happens is my distance learning director has a direct line of communications with faculty; faculty have a direct line of communication with the students, so that all kind of filters back my direction when they're not seeing good performance. So the immediate relief we were seeing was that performance to the classroom.

The other big benefit that we had seen is we have an emerging and evolving student services department. Student services was able to experience better bandwidth through the registration and our student information system. We deployed multiple registration departments or service desks to each of our campuses where students could then use our online or web registration from each of these campuses, and this is big. This is a huge, important piece of our business. There're some key things that we look at, key points in time in a term, and registration is one of them. We have hundreds of students--thousands of students--that come into our campuses to do registration, so having that student information system up and running and available over our wide area is important to us."

9. Measurable benefits

"When I think in terms of measurable benefits, did I mention total cost of ownership? Did I mention bandwidth? Did I mention reliability? Reduced calls at my help desk? That was very important to me. Those were measurable things that I had seen right off the bat.

The other thing is when it came to the impacts to my staff in terms of the support model, that to me was very significant. So when you think in terms of calls coming in and deploying staff to first answer the phone, to look into the issue, whatever it may be--because most of the time you're gonna have to research an issue, and is it really some kind of a network problem that you're having or is it a desktop problem or is it a server problem? So when I started looking at those impacts to my staff that I felt were measurable, right away the thing that I noticed was reduced number of help desk tickets. That's huge to me; now I can use these same staff for other projects, other tasks that I have inside of my department.

Now I'm preparing to go through a major upgrade of the centralized storage system that I wanted to deploy

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originally, and I think now with the QMOE solution in place, I'll be able to experience a significant savings because I'm looking at a true centralized storage system; I'm not having to look into remote storage solutions, I'm not having to look into remote servers to hook up to the storage solutions and not the same network connections. I'm basically looking at a centralized storage solution back at my main campus that I'll be able to serve all of my campuses from. I don't know the exact dollar figure, but I can tell you when I'm looking at five campuses and a storage solution at each one of these campuses, it's a significant savings for our college."

10. Areas for improvement

"My initial response would be 'nothing'. I mean, really the service has been that good; the partnership has been that good. We've just--you know, the nice thing about IT is when it works, it works; and when it doesn't work, that's when you hear about it. So when I think in terms of things we can improve on, I think it's already been improved upon. We had one incident where we had to call Qwest and we learned a little bit about how to contact Qwest, how to coordinate with Qwest, and I think basically we were able to build a little bit more on our partnership that we have with them. So if I was to look at anything, it would be that looking at that one service incident that we did have in--I think it's been five years now; three to five years--that's a pretty solid record to me."

11. Future plans

"Having had the QMOE circuits in place for a while, we've been in the planning process and actually preparing for new technologies that are coming out at CNM. One of the major ones we're looking at today is a new voice solution, so I anticipate that once we get through our procurement process, we'll be deploying a VoIP solution at CNM. And another one that's coming into the picture here in the last year was security at community colleges, or at universities at large. One of the things that we're looking at is deploying a security camera system which we know we're going to need plenty of bandwidth with; we are going to need plenty of bandwidth in order to support this, and the beauty of this is that knowing now that we have our QMOE service in place, if we have to scale our bandwidth at any time, it is simply picking up the phone and calling Qwest and letting them know we need more bandwidth.

When I look at QMOE and what it's done for us in terms of disaster recovery, it's absolutely enormous. We run a DR site today--a very scaled down DR site--which was only targeted for our main ERP system when we first implemented it. Now we're looking at building out our DR site. We have plans in place for a new data center; we have plans in place for a new disaster recovery location, and the disaster recovery location is not only going to host our ERP, but it's going to be our distance learning system; it's going to be telecommunications; it's going to be a hot site for all of our file storage. So when I look at what QMOE's enabled for my future, I am literally going to take a nearline storage solution and place it at our DR site so that whenever files are written to our main storage server, they're also going to be written to this DR site at the same time. Basically, what that means for me is that if for whatever reason I ever have a problem with my main campus and the lights do go off, I have a DR site that's ready to roll, and because of the way we've implemented the QMOE service in a meshed fashion, it's going to allow all of my other sites to connect to that same DR site seamlessly."

12. Recommendations and advice

"To me, the biggest endorsement I can give of any service is whether or not I would use it, and would I set myself out on a limb to recommend the service to somebody. When I look at my peers and some of the challenges they have, I wouldn't want to steer them in a bad direction, so to me, when I do give an endorsement of a product or a service, it's gonna be because I believe in it, and if I don't believe in it, I'm not gonna give the recommendation. And this has been a service that I feel very comfortable in recommending to my peers. It's not only in the higher ed community, but I've had people from the business community--Albuquerque's not that large of a city, so most of the IT community will jump around from the public sector to the private sector pretty regularly, but it's still an IT

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community. And I network with people all the time in the Albuquerque area, and really in the state of New Mexico. So when they come to me with these kinds of questions, they want to talk about services--'Hey Joe, what are you doing with this technology, what are you doing with this service? Has it worked well for you?'--it's very simple for me to give an endorsement to QMOE because it's just been a solid service for us."