

CSA helps deliver Xbox learning to Universities

Skype to bring Xbox into uni's learning equation:

FRAN FOO : The Australian August 06, 2013 12:00AM

UNIVERSITY of New England students could one day find themselves booting up their Xbox consoles for lectures instead of attending in person or turning to their trusty laptops.



That's one promise Microsoft's Skype videoconferencing technology holds for the university, according to its IT director Rob Irving.

UNE has just scored a lucrative deal worth millions of dollars with Microsoft to equip about 23,000 students and staff with its Lync communications platform.

The university, located in the northern NSW city of Armidale, has a distance learning population of about 80 per cent, Mr Irving said.

"Skype is a very interesting proposition because we're a distance learning education provider," he said.

"We don't know exactly all the things we can do with Skype but we're excited about it because obviously you also have the Skype platform in Xbox."

Mr Irving said Xboxes sitting in students' houses "suddenly become video conferencing units" which allows them to "participate in a lecture from home without any further investment in technology".

"It's pretty exciting and the potential is huge," he said.

Before the university dives into Skype, it's busy rolling out Lync to 20,000-odd students and 2500 employees.

Each student will receive a Lync "soft phone", a program for making phone calls over the internet and an IP-based phone number. Staff will receive additional Polycom handsets.

"We want to give them a soft phone so they can connect with any faculty member considering these phone calls can have a financial impact on them," Mr Irving said.

All classes go online as soon as a lecture starts, which means students can dial in and "attend" classes over Lync if they can't make it in person or live remotely, he said.

"We see that as a really great enabler for our students," Mr Irving said.

"Lync can be accessed on a browser or students can download the software to their Windows, Apple or (Google) Android smartphone," he said.

Mr Irving said the university wanted Lync to be its "core teaching platform" over existing solutions such as Adobe Connect for web conferencing.

UNE will use Skype as a recruitment tool so potential students, particularly those overseas, don't have to incur hefty call charges. Skype will be embedded into the university's contacts list so students merely have to click the icon and activate a call.

"The ability to market to people using Skype and they then click on a button and

get connected straight to our call centres and we enrol them into a course (presents a) pretty exciting opportunity," Mr Irving said.

Lync will go live towards the end of the year, he said, adding that Computer Systems Australia was the university's systems integrator for the project.

UNE was looking to replace its ageing Alcatel PABX system before deciding on Lync, Mr Irving said.

According to Microsoft, the deal is its largest in the Asia-Pacific education sector.

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