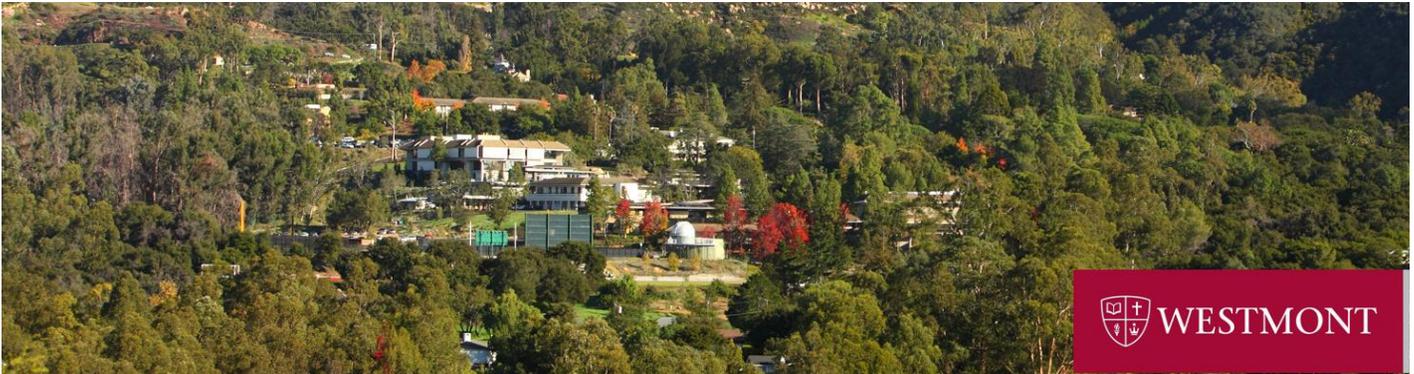# The Little College That Could
Cisco Partner Ecosystem

A come-from-behind IT shop does more with less by teaming with the Cisco® Partner Ecosystem.

Westmont College, a small liberal arts school in Santa Barbara, California, is known for many areas of excellence. Its IT department, until recently, wasn't one of them.

"When I got to Westmont 7 years ago," says Westmont chief information officer (CIO) Dr. Reed Sheard, "we were struggling. The IT department was making heroic efforts and we had some really brilliant people... but we were failing. To make matters worse our networks and servers were just disintegrating."

Sheard set out to change all that. It was an uphill battle. After he was hired his budget was cut—and cut again—and again after that. Hiring more staff was not an option. Building services from the ground up was simply impractical. There was only one way to grow, Sheard realized: find outside partners with cost-effective solutions.

So when it came time to replace Westmont's telephony system, that was his challenge: find the partner with the best solution. And as Sheard began the search, one company in particular was not at the top of his list.

"I did some research. I talked with colleagues. I decided who I thought would be the best VoIP solution. It wasn't Cisco."

Not that Sheard had anything against Cisco. Westmont had relied on Cisco technology for years. It had a close relationship with a Cisco reseller, NIC Partners. But Sheard's growth strategy was aligned to an emerging technology transition that, many people believed, was leaving Cisco behind. That transition was the rise of cloud-based services.

"With the cloud," says Sheard, "schools like Westmont, who aren't resourced like a large research university, can deploy enterprise-quality services in a way that we've never been able to do before. It opens up a golden era for us. These services are in a funding range that a small liberal arts college can afford. And they work more reliably than services that we build and manage on our own."

So that's what he wanted for telephony: an enterprise-grade system that can be hosted in the cloud. Why not Cisco? Simple: he was looking for a cloud-based solution. "I viewed Cisco as really being on the wired side," he explains. "Not necessarily having core strengths on the wireless."

Nonetheless, he was open to being proved wrong. And as it turned out, Cisco's partners were eager to provide the proof.

NIC Partners is a Cisco Gold Certified Partner, so it knows Cisco well. It also has an established history with Westmont, so NIC understood Westmont's needs and was ready to put together a solution that met its requirements.

"They had an outdated system, and they did not have the staff to maintain it," says David Schuler, director of Sales at NIC Partners. "They needed a hosted solution with automatic call distribution, integration, unified messaging—a number of things. They needed a package. We put it together."

That package included elements not just from Cisco, but more broadly, from the extended network of partners that together makes up the Cisco Partner Ecosystem.

At the center of the package is Cisco Hosted Collaboration Solution. NIC Partners quarterbacked the deal and installed

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>
> - Dr. Reed Sheard, CIO, Westmont College

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the equipment. A service provider was required for the hosting, so for that, NIC Partners turned to **Netelligent**, a Cisco Powered Services Provider and Cisco Gold Certified Partner with a Cisco Master Collaboration Specialization. And the solution had to be integrated well with Google Apps, so NIC Partners brought in **Esna**, a Cisco Solution Partner with unique expertise in Google integration.

Behind the scenes, the partners worked together to make sure that all needs were addressed in advance and all complications anticipated. Then they went to Westmont to present the solution live.

Among their audience, expectations were not necessarily all that high. "At the time," says Sheard, "I brought them in because we've done so much with Cisco in the past, and I thought, let's just hear what they've got to say, sort of out of respect for the years that we've been working together," he said laughing. "Lo and behold, we were blown away."

"We did a demonstration for over 100 people," says NIC Partner's Schuler, "to show them the beauty of the Cisco solution. How they could get their voicemails in the Google email account. How they can deploy videos through [Cisco] WebEx®. Overall, it was taking them from the 1980s to the 21st century. There were a lot of aha moments."

"It caught me off guard," says Sheard. "I was surprised how thoughtful and well-designed and integrated it was. I've done this enough now that I'm a pretty astute shopper, so I know when it's not thought out—and I know when it is."

The presentation carried the day. "After that," says Schuler, "there was really no one else in the game."

Why not? Depending who you talk to, there are several explanations or perhaps just one.

Schuler points to bottom-line effectiveness. "It was a good fit," he says. "Ultimately what we showed them was what they wanted, and they chose us. All their requirements were met by all the partners."

Michael Seeley, director of North American channels at Esna, gives credit to NIC Partners for putting the complete package together in advance. "There were other bids on the table," he says. "NIC was the only one that came in with a complete unified approach."

Mandy Cozby, director of Channels at Netelligent, emphasizes the advance cooperation among the partners that made that unified approach possible. "We worked hand in hand on this one."

Behind each explanation is a common phenomenon: the emergence of an ecosystem of Cisco partners, each bringing its own expertise to the table, who find that they work well together—and do better business by collaborating.

"We have the relationships," says Schuler. "We plug them in and make the solution. It's a good solution for us from a financial standpoint, and it's a good solution for the college as well."

Reed Sheard is happy to agree. "The individual parts come together," he says, "and together accomplish things that are far beyond their sum." The results at Westmont bear this out. "We built a service with these parts, executed and delivered it, cost-effectively and rapidly."

As for the renown of Westmont's IT department, it has taken a turn. Last year *eCampus News* selected Westmont IT as one of 12 leaders, nationwide, in the liberal arts college sector. And this year, *Computerworld* named four top CIOs in higher education. Three were at major institutions: Harvard Business School, Johns Hopkins, and the University of Arizona.

The fourth was at a small college in Santa Barbara.

For More Information

For more information about the Cisco Partner Ecosystem, visit www.cisco.com/go/partnerecosystem.

For more information about NIC Partners, visit www.nicpartnersinc.com.

For more information about Netelligent, visit www.netelligent.com.

For more information about Esna,visit www.esna.com.

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