

FirstLight Helps Bates College Make Hotel Life More Like Campus Life

OPPORTUNITY

Like most higher educational institutions, Bates College was faced with a number of challenges resulting from the 2020 pandemic, not least of which was finding creative ways of teaching remotely.

However, one of the biggest challenges facing Bates College — a premier liberal arts institution located in Lewiston, Maine — wasn't about academics. It was about accommodations. With air travel grounding most international and domestic flights, and with strict travel restrictions in place, Bates College had to figure out how to safely house students who would normally study abroad, work at internships, or otherwise leave campus.



With dorms filled to capacity, Bates College turned to a nearby hotel and reserved two floors to house approximately 100 students. It was a perfect match, since hotels had relatively few guests during the pandemic.

Physical space was one hurdle Bates overcame. The next hurdle was connectivity.

SOLUTION

"To provide remote learning and accommodate the lifestyles of our students who stream movies and games, access the Internet, and email friends and family, we had to make sure we had sufficient bandwidth at the hotel," explained Jim Bauer, Director of Network and Infrastructure at Bates. "We needed a 10 Gbps. link so students could access all the services as though they were on campus. In March of 2020, we started negotiations with a local hotel, and we needed a couple of months to do the design work, determine how we were going to move students, conduct fiber splicing, and secure budget approvals."

"We turned to FirstLight and asked if it was possible to provide connectivity to two floors in that amount of time.

It was remarkably seamless, and the project was complete in very short order. It's a testament to our partnership and our history of working together."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INDUSTRY: HIGHER EDUCATION

LOCATION: LEWISTON, MAINE

CHALLENGE:

- During the pandemic, faced with limited housing on campus, Bates College needed to quickly accommodate 100 students at a nearby hotel by providing high-speed, low-latency fiber-based connectivity. Connectivity was more important than ever given the students' need to stay connected with family, teachers, and the community during the crisis.
- The college needed a 10 Gbps. link to the college's network within a two- to three-month period, while dealing with the logistical challenges of relocation, transportation, and configuration for 100 students.
- Additionally, Bates College had to provide remote learning for its entire campus, including complex class arrangements like chemistry and biology labs.
- Bates staff wanted to continue providing recreational activities like sports when safe to do so, and while limiting in-person spectators through the use of livestreaming technology.

SOLUTION:

- Bates College turned to its long-time IT partner FirstLight to provide connectivity to the hotel in near-record time and meet Bates' ambitious schedule.
- Using FirstLight's campus wide connectivity, students were able to attend classes remotely and staff continued with various curricula without missing a beat, including offering labs remotely to students.
- As a result of FirstLight's dark fiber, Bates College was able to light some of its acquired dark fiber near an off-campus warehouse that it converted to squash courts in order to live-stream games to students on campus.

(Continued)

RESULTS

Students have continued to reside at the hotel a year later, as the pandemic has continued through early 2021, with Internet access “as good as if students were on campus,” says Bauer.

FirstLight provides Internet, dark fiber, and voice services to Bates College and has worked with the college for many years. Through FirstLight’s fiber-based connectivity, Bates was also able to virtualize their computer labs campus-wide so students could conduct class experiments virtually.

Pandemic or not, the modern college experience is about much more than academics. Bates College recently capitalized on an opportunity to acquire a former warehouse and convert it into a recreation center for squash, building four regulation courts and livestreaming games. Connectivity to this new facility was seamless as a result of having dark fiber with FirstLight.

In the meantime, Bates College is rethinking how it delivers educational content, as well as how to accommodate its increasingly remote workforce.

“The college’s position now is that if you can do your job remotely, you should consider doing so,” adds Bauer. “We’ve increased our VPN capacity and firewalls to accommodate that. People all over the world are meeting remotely now. Even faculty office hours may offer a blend of in-person and remote access.”

No doubt, future challenges on campus will be addressed with the creativity and determination of Bates College staff. “And FirstLight will be there to help,” adds Bauer.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESULTS:

- For more than a year, students housed at the hotel have been able to connect seamlessly to the Bates College network and attend classes, email family, stream movies and games as seamlessly as if they were on campus.
- Remote connectivity for staff and faculty allowed core college functions to continue throughout the pandemic due to the high quality of the connectivity experience.
- Bates continues to support local businesses and values creating partnerships with community organizations and service providers – as does FirstLight.

ABOUT FIRSTLIGHT

FirstLight provides a full complement of cost effective, high quality, scalable telecommunications services, including high speed Internet access, data center, monitoring, cloud, managed and voice services to retail and wholesale customers throughout the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic.

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