

Case Study

Location: University of North Dakota

Product: MAX Dispatch

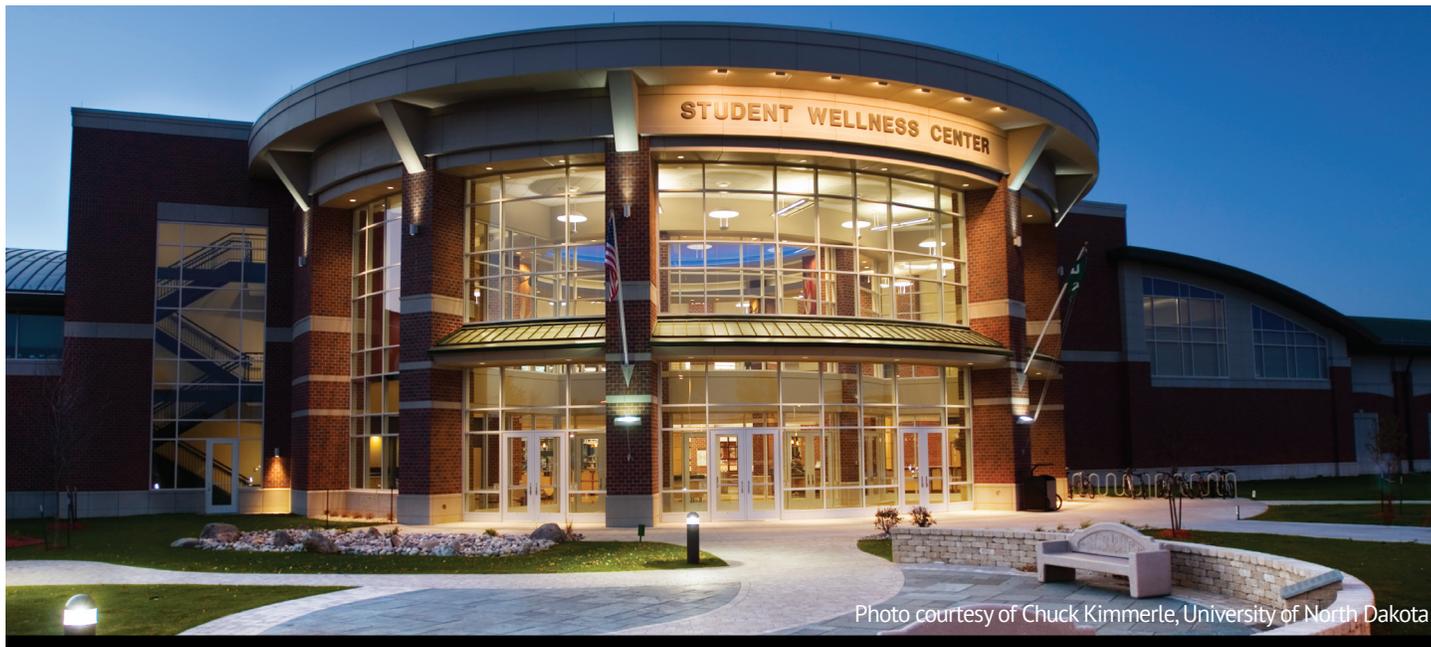


Photo courtesy of Chuck Kimmerle, University of North Dakota

MAX Dispatch Controls Vital Operations at University of North Dakota

The MAX Dispatch system recently installed at the Univ. of North Dakota Operations Center helps control the university's vast network of critical services. The system's IP functionality also supports the center's plan to place consoles at different locations throughout the campus.

With an annual enrollment of over 15,000 and roughly 200 fields of academic and professional study, the University of North Dakota (UND) is one of the Midwest's leading learning institutions. As such, it's a hub for the full range of activities and events usually associated with life on a busy university campus. Less obvious is the network of services that function behind the scenes to support the university's safety and security, law enforcement, transportation, and facilities. While the delivery of these services might go unnoticed by most casual observers, UND couldn't function without them.

For many years, the communications center that oversees these services used a dispatch system dating back to the mid-1980s to manage and coordinate their operations. But university administrators recently realized they were beginning to require

features that only newer technology could provide. They decided to obtain a new system that would provide updated features and functionality and the flexibility to decentralize the placement of some of their dispatch consoles. The new Zetron MAX Dispatch system that went live in June of 2013 is delivering on all counts.

One center, four business units

The UND Operations Center supports four separate business units: the bus transportation service, parking and parking enforcement, facilities management, and the campus police.

"We dispatch repair crews and oversee all of the university's automated monitoring and control systems," says operations center supervisor, Pamela Zimbelman. "This includes fire and security alarms, and heating and air conditioning systems. Although each of the business units operates on its own, being able to manage them through the center makes for a more coordinated effort."

This is no small feat given the sheer physical size of the university. The campus comprises 6.5 million square feet spread over 585 acres. It has 234 buildings, including an airport for the aviation school, a research center, a medical school, a law school, a business school, and 11 colleges.

MAX Dispatch takes the lead

Once the operations center administrators decided they needed new dispatch equipment, they set about defining what it should include. They then issued a request for proposals.

Randall Bohlman, UND's technology advancement coordinator, says that as they looked at a multitude of possible systems, a proposal submitted by Zetron reseller Stan's Communications and featuring Zetron's MAX Dispatch system emerged as the leading contender. "The MAX system offered IP-based features that would take care of our needs now and well into the future, and it came in at the best price," says Bohlman. "It would also be installed and maintained by Stan's Communications, a very experienced and trusted local vendor."

Based in Grand Forks, North Dakota, Stan's Communications has been providing total communications solutions to law-enforcement, public-safety, and private-sector customers throughout the Red River Valley for over 50 years.

Positive reviews from Minnkota

A visit to view an installation of MAX Dispatch at the Minnkota Power Co-op in Grand Forks reinforced the sense that MAX Dispatch was the best choice for the UND. "Minnkota's administrators and dispatchers all gave the MAX system very positive reviews," says Zimbelman. "They told us they liked its features and how easy it is to learn and use. Based on this and all of our other criteria, we chose MAX Dispatch."

Room to expand

The solution for UND included two positions of MAX Dispatch that would immediately be installed in the operations center. It also provided the capability to add six more positions when UND's budget would allow it. Five would be installed at various locations throughout the university. The sixth would be a mobile position that could be set up anywhere if an emergency forced them to evacuate the main center. MAX Dispatch not only makes it extremely easy to add positions, but its remote command-and-control capabilities allow mobile positions to be set up quickly and securely, wherever and whenever they're needed.

An easy install

Mike Bartholome, a technician with Stan's Communications, oversaw the installation of MAX Dispatch at the UND operations

center. He says that running the new and old systems in parallel allowed the installation to take place without interrupting any of the center's operations.

"We kept the consoles and equipment rack for the existing system running in one room while we set up the new rack and consoles in another," he says. "Then we set up and configured the new system and brought it online, one console at a time. It all went without a hitch."

Minimal training required

Because the MAX Dispatch user interface is so intuitive, bringing the dispatchers up to speed on how to use it required only minimal training.

"Training was quick and easy," says Zimbelman. "Once the system was installed and ready, our dispatchers were able to catch onto it and use it without having to undergo extended formal training. That's a great feature for us to have moving forward as we add more dispatchers. And it's another reason why we chose the MAX system."

Enhancing safety and security

One of adaptations of MAX Dispatch for UND involved integrating the operation center building's door controls into the consoles. "We have to be up and running 24/7, so the operators are here by themselves at all hours," says Zimbelman. "To keep the environment safe and secure, we have three sets of door switches incorporated into the consoles. This allows the dispatchers to control the doors directly from their positions."

Happy with the system

The UND operations center's new MAX Dispatch system is delivering amply on the features and functionality for which it was chosen.

"We're very happy with the system," says Zimbelman. "Our dispatchers especially like the recording feature. We monitor transmissions between the campus police and central dispatch. If we ever need to assist them but missed the original transmission, we can instantly play it back so we know the situation and what we need to do and how we can help. The system also does a great job of supporting our separate business units while allowing us to consolidate operations if we ever need to during an emergency. It's a perfect fit for our needs and budget."



ZETRON AMERICAS
PO Box 97004,
Redmond, WA USA
98073-9704
(P) +1 425 820 6363
(F) +1 425 820 7031
(E) zetron@zetron.com

ZETRON EMEA
27-29 Campbell Court,
Bramley, Hampshire RG26
5EG, United Kingdom
(P) +44 1256 880663
(F) +44 1256 880491
(E) uk@zetron.com

ZETRON AUSTRALASIA
PO Box 3045, Stafford
Mail Centre, Stafford QLD
4053, Australia
(P) +61 7 3856 4888
(F) +61 7 3356 6877
(E) au@zetron.com



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