

How La Trobe University is transforming the future of Higher Education

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UNIVERSITY

Customer snapshot

Customer: La Trobe University

Industry: Higher Education

Overview

With more than 37,000 students and 3,000 staff members, plus seven city and regional campuses across Victoria and New South Wales, connecting their students, staff, research community and partners in industry and government is vital to La Trobe University.

With the advent of the pandemic, traditional investments in bricks and mortar infrastructure were no longer enough. While the university did manage to switch to online learning and research in a matter of days, they recognised that the quality of the experience varied widely.

La Trobe knew that to deliver exceptional experiences for all their students, researchers, staff and industry partners, they would need a strong digital foundation. As a result, the University is making the most significant investment in its 50-year history into technologies that will transform it into the University City of the Future.

In partnership with Optus, La Trobe University is building the University City of the Future, with an initial focus on enhancing their networks, contact centre and embracing cloud



It is a bold and pivotal move designed to differentiate La Trobe and make it the destination of choice for domestic and international students, staff and industry partners, as well as driving cost-optimisation and service efficiencies across its IT functions.

The strategy is being brought to life with Optus, a five-year partnership with the university and a curated selection of Optus partners, including Cisco for networks, Amazon Web Services (AWS) for cloud and NICE for contact centres.

A shared passion for innovation

The youngest of the three original universities in Victoria, La Trobe has a long history of breaking new ground. As a challenger telco, Optus and La Trobe have much in common culturally. This is reflected in a shared passion for innovation, with current areas of focus including digital health and wellbeing, preventative care, cybersecurity, Advanced Manufacturing, AgTech and the future of food – the latter being of keen interest to many of the 37,000 students across their campuses.

Optus is supporting the appointment of a new academic research chair in digital health with a cyber skill and awareness initiative to explore how technology can help transform health outcomes.

On a practical level, the partnership works both ways, with Optus providing scholarships, internships and placements for students. At the same time, La Trobe is a significant contributor to Optus University, helping re- and up-skill Optus staff by offering them the opportunity to gain credentials in such areas as UX, Data Analytics and cybersecurity.

Working together, La Trobe and Optus have also been successful with several Commonwealth and Federal grants, including a cyber awareness initiative for SMBs, a key pillar of the Optus customer community.

"We deliberately went after low-hanging fruit – projects with the quickest time to impact."
– Mark Smith, Chief Operating Officer, La Trobe University



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Facing up to the challenge of change

Encouraging the university board and council to support a change in focus from physical spaces to digital capabilities was the first step in La Trobe's transformation journey, and the size of the investment reflects the strength of their support, particularly given that this began at a time when La Trobe were experiencing challenges due to the pandemic.

To do more and act faster with fewer resources, the University's IT staff, led by the Chief Operating Officer (COO) were under extraordinary pressure to operate with greater efficiency. Prioritising projects was critical to ensure swift results and build a strong foundation for the future.

The Optus partnership was vital as La Trobe could leverage lessons learned from Optus and Cisco's prior experiences.

Four key pillars are driving La Trobe's transformation, including:

1. Provide digitally enhanced teaching and learning, including micro-courses, digital credentials, personalised learning and lifelong learning opportunities.
2. Drive research excellence through partnerships and technology innovation.
3. Leverage digital technologies for operational excellence, including automation and improvement of existing processes.
4. Enhance agility through business-ready, scalable, and secure digital platforms and services.

As an example, digital transformation is enhancing service delivery for those studying at La Trobe's regional campuses – providing students with access to subjects that were previously only available at metropolitan campuses.

Where turning up in person at a lecture theatre was once the norm, today, La Trobe's students can learn in many different ways – at a time of their choice, in the mode of their choice, to suit what else is happening in their working and personal lives.

In total, there are 45 programs running across six streams and the university is currently measuring 187 key benefits that tie into both the project strategy and La Trobe's overall strategy.

Bringing the future to life

This is just the beginning.

Over the next decade, La Trobe University will evolve into a world-class University City of the Future at their 235-hectare Melbourne campus in Bundoora. The new infrastructure will turn their campus 'inside out' and welcome the local community onto the campus as a place to live, learn, work, socialise and stay healthy.

As part of this, a new Research and Innovation Precinct is being created, which includes two new Innovation Hubs that will connect businesses with research, students and infrastructure.

To foster rapid and agile innovation, technologies such as 5G, Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) will underpin innovative new teaching methods, support campus-wide activation and power new models of research that will transform Australia's critical national industries. Underpinning this will be the partnership with Optus.



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La Trobe University makes connecting a priority with a Contact Centre designed **and** **managed by Optus**



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The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 – and the resultant shift to home learning and working and the many questions it raised – only served to highlight the shortcomings of La Trobe's existing contact centre solution.

In the spring of 2020, La Trobe started exploring new contact centre solutions that could address their immediate and future needs as they evolve over time. They wanted a future-proof solution that was truly flexible, provided extensive reporting options and allowed users to engage via their channel of choice, be that voice, email, chat, social, outbound or SMS.

As well as improving availability, service and the user experience, cost savings were also on La Trobe's strategic wish list.

In the highly competitive higher education market, La Trobe also recognised that delivering an outstanding digital experience to students and other stakeholders could be a winning move. As the university itself says: "Everything we do is grounded in a shared commitment to ensuring students have a positive and rewarding experience at La Trobe."

Delivering on La Trobe's wish list

Following an extensive process, La Trobe selected the Optus Cloud Contact solution (OCC) as their pathway forward.

The solution Optus manages for La Trobe is powered by NICE CXone's award-winning digital interaction platform – widely recognised as a leading cloud contact centre platform.

Integrated and frictionless omnichannel experiences

La Trobe was looking to enable its contact centres to deliver integrated and frictionless omnichannel experiences that leverage customer data and are contextualised in the moment. The OCC solution is an integrated offering that brings together omnichannel communications, customer interaction automation, analytics and Artificial Intelligence to do exactly that.

It has been designed to integrate seamlessly with an extensive range of CRM and back-office systems as a standard feature and can be embedded inside the university's own CRM environment, enabling single sign-on and a connected system of record and system of engagement.

La Trobe's community can now enjoy a connected journey across all interaction channels in real time: inbound, outbound, voice, chat, social media, email and SMS platforms.

Deep integration with the university's back-end processes helps to streamline and improve each interaction La Trobe has with its stakeholders

Flexible, scalable and cost-effective

Being cloud-based, all an agent needs for contact centre access is a PC or laptop and access to the Internet, which means they can work through any channel regardless of location.

As a result, La Trobe now has the option of basing service agents or contact centres in regional communities, driving down the cost to serve whilst supporting local communities and local jobs and supporting their One University ethos.

The solution also helps drive student engagement, opening the way for proactive outbound calling campaigns and multi-channel communications.

OCC quickly scales with demand, allowing the university to handle seasonal variability or major incidents easily. With this true SaaS solution, La Trobe only pays for functionality they use each month, with no need to pay in advance or for unnecessary bundled services.

Solution highlights

Key benefits of the La Trobe solution include:

- A highly scalable cloud-based platform that integrates easily with La Trobe's own platforms
- Improved user service and improved consistency of CX, with users able to engage regardless of their channel choice, location and time
- Reduced cost to serve
- Continuous performance improvements through enhanced quality management and data and analytics, including KPI-rich reports and dashboards
- Extensive range of self-service and support capabilities via Optus
- Workforce Management system optimises contact centre resourcing
- Opens new ways of working, including working from home.

By partnering with Optus, La Trobe can now be confident in its ability to support existing and prospective students, staff and customers in a flexible, scalable, and cost-efficient manner that also delivers superior improved experiences.



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**A flagship project with
Optus and Amazon Web
Services **sees a seamless
'lift and shift' to the cloud****

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On-premise data centres may once have been considered state-of-the-art. However, after decades of under-investment in their physical data centre infrastructure, La Trobe recognised that they needed a more agile, resilient and secure solution.

They wanted a solution that would allow them to respond more rapidly to changing needs, that would allow them to approve access to data by segmenting user profiles and teams, and that would be easier to manage given a reduced headcount and ongoing skills shortage in the market.

Leveraging 'Optus' experience and long-established relationship with Amazon Web Services (AWS) and VMWare, in 2021, La Trobe began a lift and shift to the cloud in a flagship project that was delivered two months ahead of schedule, thanks to the implementation teams at Optus and VMWare.

Today, 80% of the University's core infrastructure now sits on VMware on AWS, with more than 500 VMs having been moved seamlessly to a cloud environment. This has significantly reduced the risks to the university, in a context where the expectation is for always-on access.

Key to the success of the project was carefully considered operations change management.

'It's all well and good delivering large transformations, but you also need someone in change management to consider what services will be delivered to the operations team, how they will manage them and what the future state will be,' says Jason Smith, La Trobe's Director of Engagement and Delivery.

From a resourcing perspective, the ITS team benefit from a more flexible operating model, capable of being managed by a multipurpose hybrid team, while as-a-service offerings from Optus allow them to focus on higher value initiatives.

The focus now is shifting the remaining on-premise infrastructure and bringing it together in an optimised cloud platform of choice that will provide a firm foundation for a university that aims to be a beacon in Melbourne's north, not only for students, but also for industry and the community.

'It's a lot easier to sleep at night now, knowing that the redundancy and efficiencies are there, and that something is not about to go 'bang'.

– Jason Smith, Director of Engagement & Delivery, La Trobe University

Solution highlights

Key benefits of La Trobe's cloud solution include:

- A more flexible, agile operating model
- Improved resiliency and redundancy
- Ease of management – managed services from Optus reduce pressure on the ITS team
- A backup-as-a-service platform has been implemented to back up VMWare Cloud (VMC) onto AWS, which is now being extended to the remaining on-premise infrastructure and future public cloud workloads.

By partnering with Optus, and leveraging its ecosystem of leading technology partners, La Trobe can be confident in a solution that is more agile, resilient, secure and can adapt to the changing education landscape.

Optus continues to provide ongoing consultancy for the La Trobe's cloud journey, including aligning to the AWS MAP program for Migration and Readiness Planning for future cloud workloads.



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Investing into tomorrow's connectivity foundations

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La Trobe University is the first to admit that there had been significant underinvestment in its networks in previous years, creating high levels of complexity, making it difficult to manage and exposing both resiliency and security issues.

Uneven levels of connectivity, particularly on regional campuses, resulted in an inconsistent user experience while limited network segmentation and security controls within the environment also restricted the rapid and secure onboarding of students, staff, external entities and systems.

Now, an ambitious network uplift and transformation program is seeing La Trobe invest \$20M into a software-defined network architecture with state-of-the-art security working with Optus and Cisco.

The university is shifting to a wireless-first approach, with policy based access, for user network connectivity that will involve the implementation of more than 4,000 wireless access points across seven locations.

While the project is still at a relatively early stage, the new network will provide the foundation for a host of exciting innovations and services, designed to deliver superior experiences that will attract students, researchers and industry partners to the university.



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Putting the user first

In a twist from a traditional technology-led, back-office operational approach, the user experience is at the heart of the transformation.

The project aims to deliver a centralised enterprise business network that provides a seamless user experience via a programmable, agile and policy-driven platform, mitigating cyber security vulnerabilities and replacing exhausted assets.

'From the outset, we've asked the teams to consider the university's teaching, administration and research functions and how the network will enable them. What is the experience that they want? We then work back from there to develop the underlying technology platform,' says Jason Smith.

Sponsorship from the highest level has been key to the overall digital transformation journey, with quarterly meetings with the Chancellor to provide an update on the work being undertaken and outcomes.

A series of consultative deep-dive workshops with La Trobe, Cisco and Optus identified several issues with La Trobe's current technology infrastructure, services and capabilities, which helped define the scope and objectives of the network transformation roadmap and journey.



Enhancing the smarts

Optus is now six months into the 18-month program to deliver the new network and security architecture, based on Cisco's Software Defined Access (SDA) and Application Centric Infrastructure (ACI) technologies, including design, implementation, migration and project governance services.

Embedded in the project is a platform-based approach to security across the network, using Cisco's ISE, Secure Network Analytics and Umbrella technologies.

The end-to-end transformation program is made up of various streams that will transform the core architecture and foundation of La Trobe's network, including:

- **Campus** – Software Defined Access Enablement – Transforming the campus environment into a modern software-defined capability across a single fabric (wired and wireless), enabling adaptative and automating security controls and segmentation based on user profiles.
- **Data Centre** – Application Centric Infrastructure – Transforming the legacy data centre environment to provide a modern software-defined approach to support on-premise applications and enhanced telemetry and visibility.

- **Centralised Security Policy** – Identity Services Engine – Adopting a centralised security policy and enforcement capability that will enable identity-based security, network and segmentation controls that are adaptive based on identity and context.
- **Cloud Security** – Umbrella – Enablement of an organisation-wide cloud-based security capability that will extend security controls beyond La Trobe's physical perimeters and adopt an always-on security defence concept that continues to protect the University against security-based threats.
- **Secure Network Analytics (Stealthwatch)** – Uplifting security awareness within the University's environment by delivering rich telemetry through a central mechanism that enhances security visibility, context and leads to rapid and automated threat containment capability.



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Solution highlights

Key benefits of the La Trobe's network solution include:

- Software Defined Network architecture with state-of-the-art security from Cisco
- Plug-and-play architecture scales from on-premise into any cloud environment while maintaining security posture and policies
- Secure-by-design philosophy centralises and automates the deployment of security policies based on a user's profile
- Visibility and insights to assist with proactive network management
- Improved security insights and incident responses and extends security beyond the physical bricks-and-mortar environment, preparing La Trobe for research and learning beyond their campuses
- Embeds automation at the centre of all network services.

Optus also managed the transition La Trobe's Fixed Voice, Mobiles, SMS and Student Accommodation WAN earlier this year. The partnership is now embarking on transitioning La Trobe to an Optus managed Mobility Service to support for the university's mobile fleet.

La Trobe now has a trusted end-to-end telecommunications and IT service provider and strategic partner who understands its business challenges, thinks proactively and works alongside them to achieve their key strategic goals, as well as cost savings to allow the University to focus on their core business and day-to-day operations.

Get started today

For any further enquires or information please contact your Optus Account Manager.

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