



Right On Queue

With NEC as a partner, a major university and its hospital look to reduce waiting time for customers and patients who dial in

Sitting along old Route 66 in Albuquerque, N.M., the main campus of the University of New Mexico (UNM) is a city within a city that utilizes more than 24,000 phone lines within its internal telecommunications system. It isn't just faculty and staff using all of those lines, either. The campus is also home to the UNM Hospitals, which include the only Level 1 trauma center in the state. In fact, it was the expansion of the hospital that presented a unique challenge to Mark Reynolds, UNM's Interim Director IT, and his technology partner Doug Manning, Director Strategic Accounts with NEC.

In 2005 a site was chosen for a new hospital building, which was to be built on the exact same spot as an existing building that housed the main phone system through which all voice communications on

campus flowed. "We had a legacy PBX [private branch exchange] system that had been there since 1980," says Reynolds. "Then the hospital said, 'We're going to construct a building right on top of you.' We had an aging voice infrastructure, and after considering multiple options, a university committee agreed that a hybrid solution approach offered by NEC was most cost-effective. Rather than moving and installing a brand-new system and infrastructure, we would migrate to the new PBX of that time, essentially entombing it under the new hospital building."

The UNM and NEC teams were able to approach this massive undertaking because "we have a very strategic partnership," says NEC's Manning of his work with Reynolds, a joint effort that has now spanned nine years. The decision was made to bury the central voice system under the new building, and that meant that over an 18-month period,

the two teams had to migrate the system with a live construction site sitting atop it. Most importantly, says Reynolds, "We had to do it with little or no downtime. We had to nail the planning for the footprint, the power requirements and the logistics up front," says Manning, and the hospital, clinics and internal 911 system had to continue to function without a hitch.

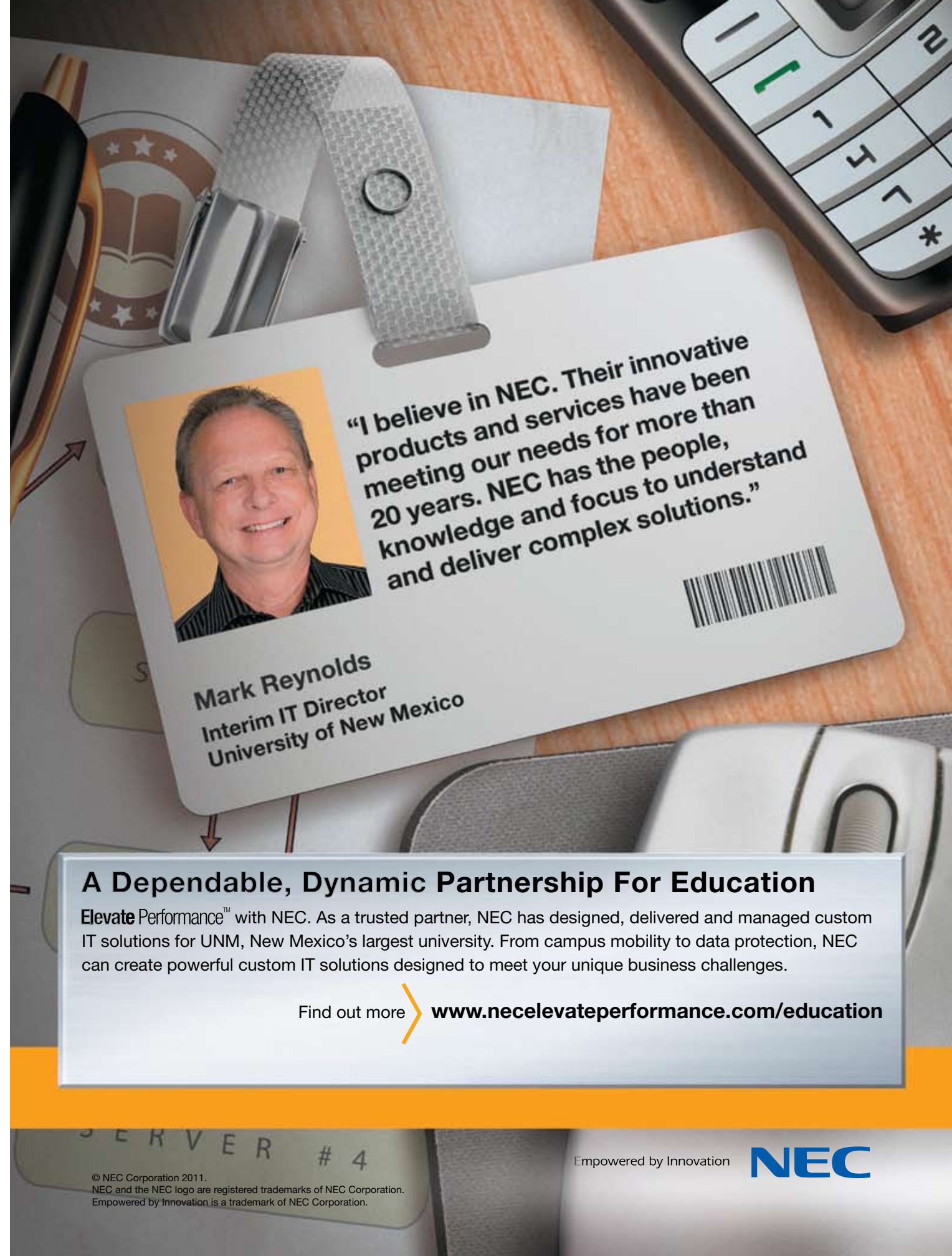
Underground, and Under the Radar

The NEC personnel staffing a help desk—intended to remediate any problems that arose directly from the project—didn't get much action. For Reynolds, the most satisfying aspect of the completed task was that "we accomplished all of that and most people didn't realize we were doing it."

Reynolds, Manning and their respective teams continue to look forward while handling the present in Albuquerque. Six NEC engineers are on site at the campus full-time to handle day-to-day support, and NEC "continues to assist and consult on migration plans and the university's vision for the future, and how to get there with road maps that leverage the life cycle of existing technology," says Manning.

Atop the current to-do list for Reynolds and Manning: a gradual migration to VoIP (voice over Internet protocol) that will provide greater network mobility and flexibility for users, and dramatically reduce energy costs, and an upgrade of the hospital's call management system, from the old "We're busy, please continue to hold and enjoy the music" message to a Time and Queue format that will let callers know how long a wait they face and provide the option of receiving a return call at a specified time. "It's all about giving customers better facing options where they don't currently have them," says Reynolds. ●

The most satisfying aspect of the completed task for Reynolds was that "we accomplished all of that and because it went so smoothly most people didn't even realize we were doing it."



Mark Reynolds
Interim IT Director
University of New Mexico

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