soma enable Byron Region Community College's digital transformation –
just in time for COVID-19

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Introducing **BRCC**

Byron Region Community College (BRCC) is an adult educational pillar for the Byron Shire community providing a variety of adult education options for their community for over 30 years. This includes an innovative business education program called, Sourdough Business Pathways, providing experienced support and learning for up and coming businesses in the region.

BRCC delivers this crucial service through strict adherence to their mission of "Embracing and facilitating community resilience and personal growth through learning" by ensuring they provide affordable and diverse world-class educational services that benefit the community.

Unpinning all this is the hard-working team behind the scenes who ensure the students have access to the tools they need to succeed in their chosen courses and training. The growing popularity and reliance on IT-based educational solutions to conduct remote learning and courses is not a challenge BRCC has taken lightly. They had taken steps pre-COVID toward evolving the way they approach their operations and how their students conduct their learning. BRCC understood that to continue serving their community with world-class educational services, they needed to be open to the world of remote learning and IT-based solutions to enhance the student experience.

BYRON REGION COMMUNITY COLLEGE
SNAPSHOT

Byron Shire-based NFP

3 campuses

Additional Sourdough Business Pathways service

Transforming operations to allow online learning

2,000+ students served per year

23+ years of operation

The
Situation

Prior to engagement with soma technology group, or any hint of the pandemic to come, BRCC traditionally had relied upon in-house IT to manage their operations and systems. As current Asset Coordinator, Anthony Hobbs, would put it 'keep the lights on and things running'.

While having someone in-house has its advantages, BRCC realised the digital backbone of their organisation couldn't rely on any single person. As a result, external support would be needed to assist Anthony in driving the college's digital agenda into the future. As Anthony stated, "I've never had the opportunity to really get into the nuts and bolts of our systems. I've just stayed at a high level so I knew we needed to outsource to maintain our high level of service for our students, and map our path forward."

"

We originally ran operations through an in-house team manager for all our IT. After they left the organisation we saw the need for additional external IT support with specialists to support us as we grew. Now that we are a more complex organisation, with more staff, students and assets, a team that is available 24/7 that has the skills is needed.
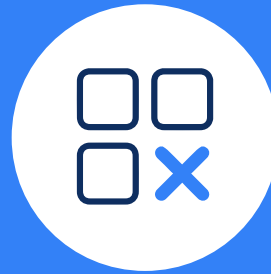
Richard Vinycomb
Director of Byron Region Community College

Richard, Anthony and the team knew what was needed but lacked the internal capabilities or specialist manpower to achieve their digital goals.

Their agenda can be outlined in three key initial projects:

BYRON REGION COMMUNITY COLLEGE

DIGITAL PAIN POINTS

APPLICATION ISSUES

- Lack of application integration

- Regular application downtime, e.g. MYOB

NETWORKING ISSUES

- Poor WiFi coverage

- Low WiFi bandwidth

- Frequent WiFi dropouts

SYSTEM ISSUES

- Limited and Manual Backup and Disaster Recovery

- No Business Continuity Strategy

- EOL Server Infrastructure Issues

Enter soma

Richard, Anthony and the BRCC team knew it was time to find additional IT support they could rely on. Rather than try and recruit, train and afford the team of specialists they needed for their digital transformation, they sought external support.

Neighbouring college, Ace Community Colleges, had undertaken a similar journey and were already progressing along their digital transformation journey. They strongly praised soma for their quality service and support, and the success of their IT transformation led by the soma team.

Richard and the team then met with and reviewed soma's services and saw in them a valuable IT resource that they could trust to get them where they needed on the technology front. Once on board, soma quickly mapped and analysed the BRCC systems and applications to map out a successful digital transformation plan that would tick all BRCC's boxes.

soma's Initial Digital Agenda For BRCC:

01 Improve campus Wi-Fi quality and reliability

02 Develop a digital transformation roadmap

03 Securely migrate operations, systems and data to the cloud

Anthony was impressed by the approach soma took from the outset with their focussed processes sharing, "As the in-house IT coordinator I would be the harshest critic, but I was very impressed with their coordination from the start."

Unbeknownst to both BRCC and soma at the time however, was how crucial digital services and digital transformation in general would be for everyone with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic not far down the road.

From the initial consultation and after doing some due diligence, and getting a strong reference from a neighbouring college, I was sold on the advantages they presented of working with soma.

*Richard Vinycomb – Director of Byron Region Community College*

Transforming
Campus Networks & Wi-Fi

One of the biggest pain points, and instigators for working with soma to begin with, was the unreliable, and inconsistent Wi-Fi service experienced by all parties on campus.

Anthony Hobbs explained that catering to multiple groups across campus was not a function possible with their near decade old previous system. As he shared:

> Our previous Wi-Fi configuration and system was set up in a way that didn't really support multiple networks, which we needed because it was for the college staff, the students, and the businesses on campus relying on it. This meant we had a lot of different networks fighting each other and it was not designed to handle that. We needed something much better that could.'
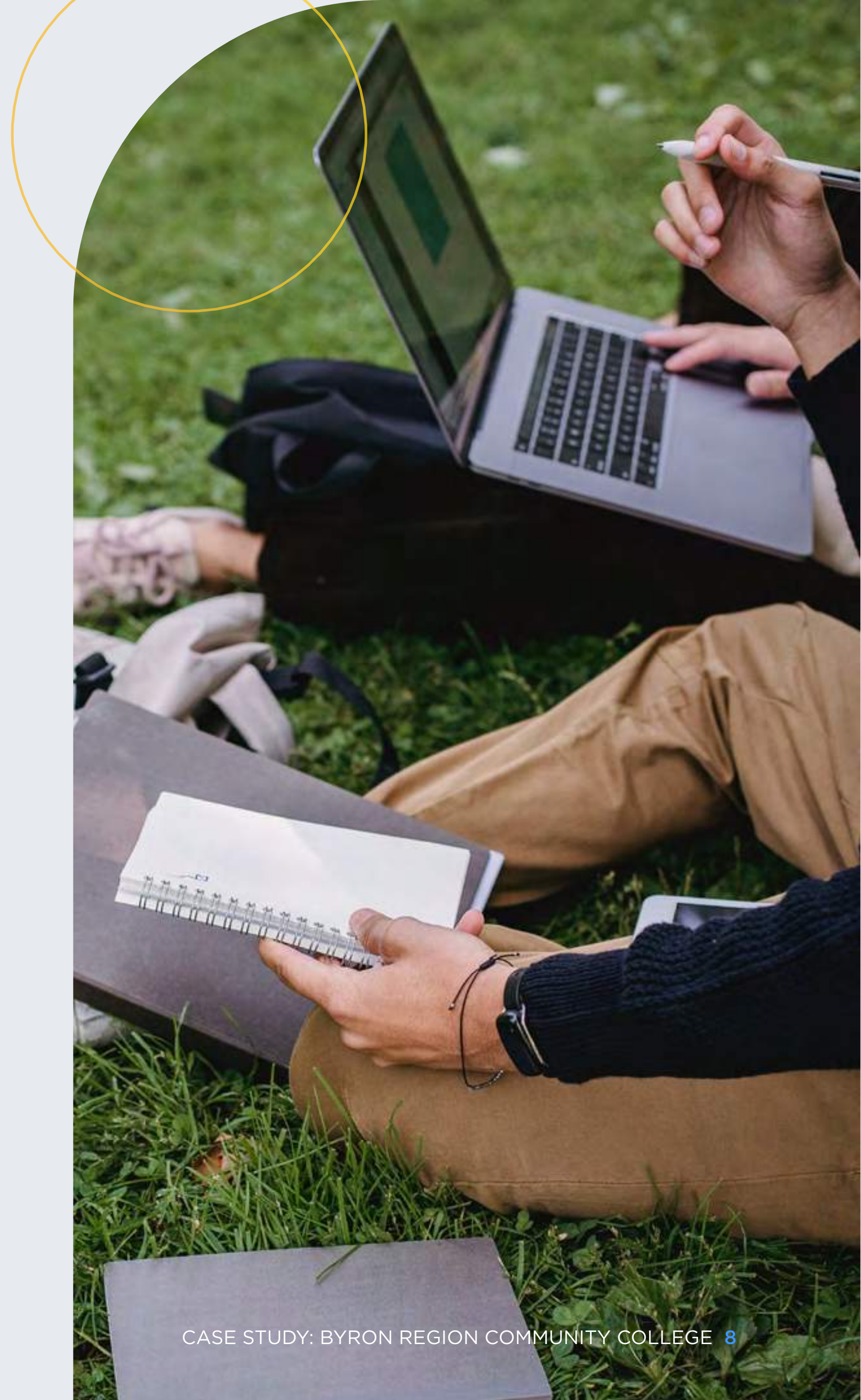
We were experiencing patchy, inconsistent Wi-Fi, particularly on our Mullumbimby Campus. Not only that but this was impacting the ten businesses in our Sourdough incubator units scattered across campus.

Everyone was suffering. We wanted this to change so we had to consult with soma on a fully upgraded system and they got right to work. Now everyone's happy.

Richard Vinycomb – Director of Byron Region Community College
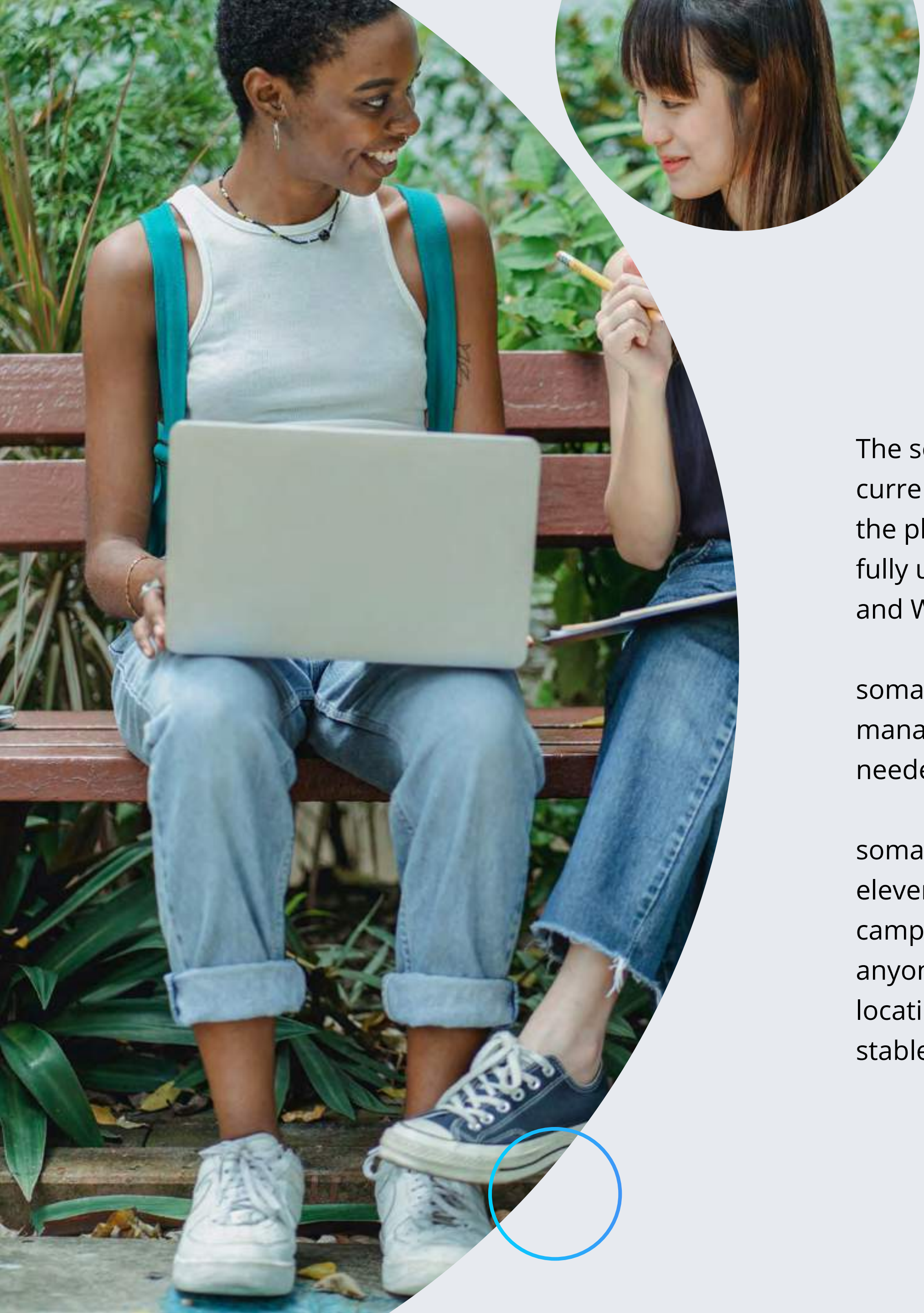
The soma team got right to work removing the current failing networking system and developed the plan for the best path forward as far as a fully upgraded system to deliver the network and Wi-Fi upgrade.

soma proposed Cisco Meraki for a new cloud-managed network with the security options needed to keep everything and everyone secure.

soma used this solution to centrally manage eleven new WAP terminals deployed across campus to ensure WiFi was no longer patchy for anyone, anywhere across campus. These terminal locations were carefully scoped to ensure this stable coverage could be achieved.

In addition to this, existing data points were leveraged across campus to connect the WAPs to the network wherever possible for cost effectiveness and fast deployment.

To secure this new network, and ensure it could be efficiently managed moving forward, soma created three separate wireless networks to cater to staff, students and the businesses in the Hub.

The BRCC and soma teams confirm these previous dead spots on campus and common Wi-Fi dropouts are a thing of the past across campus.

Securely
Migrating to the Cloud

With reliable Wi-Fi and networks in place, BRCC could have soma tackle their other daily tech-based terror: their four outdated and out of warranty on-premise servers they relied upon for everything. They had been the digital backbone of the organisation for nearly a decade and were no longer capable of providing reliable effective systems for staff and students.

Anthony recalled the uncomfortable regularity to having to manually reboot all the systems on a Monday morning after the server went down over the weekend. The fear of the server completely failing and losing everything was a bigger concern however.

soma completed the project on time and resulted in BRCC becoming completely cloud-based. Office 365 now provides all email services with the latest Microsoft Office suite. SharePoint has been implemented for the

secure sharing of documents for staff and external BRCC stakeholders. Email and SharePoint data is kept secure by infinite, granular recovery through Datto SaaS.

Hybrid cloud document management now enables secure access to data from anywhere without the need for a VPN or other remote tools.

This is all wrapped up securely in a Backup and Business Continuity solution for the entire platform through constant geo-redundant backups.

The once relied upon servers well past their use-by date have now all been successfully decommissioned leaving BRCC with a clean, secure cloud-based IT platform without the expense of onsite server maintenance and empowering BRCC with the ability to effectively work remotely.

We had an ageing infrastructure situation, we were at the point where if any of our servers died we would lose both connectivity and data. Those services held our network together and could not be easily migrated so it left us unprotected, without reliable backups in place.

Anthony Hobbs – Asset Coordinator of Byron Region Community College

Countering
COVID impacts

> When the first lockdown hit early last year, we had to do some fast footwork and learn quickly about remote learning and supporting students at home.
>
> *Richard Vinycomb – Director of Byron Region Community College*

Efficiency and a tech-fuelled experience for future students was the goal for BRCC and their digital transformation projects with soma. However, the unprecedented became precedented when the COVID-19 pandemic impacted organisations worldwide. Australia unfortunately was swept up in the pandemic with the impacts felt across every industry. Australia's educational industry was one of the hardest hit, with educational facilities closed and traditional face-to-face learning no longer an option for the foreseeable future with us all suddenly stuck in lockdown.

Anthony dictates the rapid transformation undertaken by BRCC in those initial weeks as one of rapid adjustments, solution sourcing and a lot of training.

He elaborated:

"COVID impacted us greatly. We had to in the course of two weeks transform what was previously a face-to-face operation into a world of video conferencing, and cloud apps. We needed to set up online accounts, and train staff, students and tutors on how to conduct their classes online all while trying to remain cybersafe."

Fortunately for BRCC, acquiring the technical expertise, cloud resources and IT support for such a drastic digital transition, or as Richard put it 'achieve a lot in a short time frame' had already taken place prior to COVID's arrival which ensured this pivot to a digital environment for staff and students was possible, and able to be rolled out efficiently and securely.

Outcomes

What's Next?

" Our relationship with soma is still evolving. It has been great having their experience on board to improve and protect our systems and show us what can be possible. Now we can reflect a bit on the data and see where we can continue to improve our performance."

Richard Vinycomb – Director of Byron Region Community College

" I credit the soma team for always being so responsive. The techs are also really approachable and have amazing knowledge. They're always giving us those extra insights to make sure we are supported. Whether we have a small app issue or a bigger technical concern, they are always right there to work on a solution.

soma did great work on upgrading our Wi-Fi and my measurement of its success is that I no longer hear any complaints about its quality from staff.

Anthony Hobbs
Asset Coordinator of Byron Region Community College

soma has been a great company for us. I'm really glad that my colleague recommended them and I don't have any intention to change our relationship. It is good to know that if I've got any concerns, large or small, I can communicate that to them and they will respond quickly. They go at our problems like hound dogs, even when the problems aren't always easy to fix.

When it comes to security, things are definitely better. We feel more confident as a whole and we now hardly get any spam or phishing attempts getting through. They do a lot of testing and monitoring around phishing and it's comforting to see that they're testing the systems, and communicating with our staff to make sure they are always secure and aware of the latest developments.

When it comes to connectivity, the campus black spots are gone and everyone is happy with the quality since the soma upgrade. As a bonus, we've now got much better connectivity not just on campus but between the Mullumbimby and the Byron Bay campuses.

Richard Vinycomb – Director of Byron Region Community College

Get in touch with soma today to arrange a free consultation and quote.

Get in touch ⟶

soma
technology group

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