

SIMPLY SPEAK:

Seamless Communication Within Schools

VIEWPOINT



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OUR GUEST TODAY is Magen McGahee, the CFO for Galaxy Next Generation, Inc. In this episode, titled “Simply Speak,” Magen and I discuss the importance of seamless communication within schools. We’ll talk about how a range of Galaxy products like G2 Secure, G2 Visual Alerts and G2 Link make both emergency and non-emergency communication throughout a school facility as easy as the touch of a button. Learn how these products were built from user feedback and how they’re helping solve problems in the Ed Tech industry. You’ll also learn more about an emergency communication solution that can initiate a lockdown procedure and contact law enforcement in one fluid motion. This episode is sponsored by Galaxy Next Generation, Inc.

SPACES4LEARNING: Hi, and welcome to another episode of Schools in Focus. Our guest today is Magen McGahee, the CFO for Galaxy Next Generation, Inc. Magen, thanks for joining us today.

MAGEN MCGAHEE: Thanks for having me on. It’s my pleasure.

S4L: First off, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you ended up in your current role?

MAGEN: Sure, yeah. Well, my background is all in education. And the current role, being in educational technology, was kind of a natural progression. But my career actually started out as a school teacher. So, I taught both third and fifth grade in special needs and regular ed, and decided only after being in the classroom for a couple of years that I felt the desire to, I guess, touch more students outside of just the 30 that were in my room. And so, I transitioned from that into educational technology sales and worked for a couple of different entities. And I went all the way from territory sales manager up to being part

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— Magen McGahee

of a leadership team at a company that was Mimio, which is now Boxlight.

And then it wasn’t until 2015 that we decided to kind of spin off and start our own concepts and ideas with Galaxy. And so, that year was when Gary LeCroy, my business partner, and I founded the company and have kind of grown it from there, and since taken it public, and you know, lots of different renditions and lots of different new products that we can talk about throughout the podcast. But that’s really it in a nutshell.

S4L: And has it been helpful being on both sides? You’ve been in the classroom, you’ve been a teacher, you’ve been on the front lines. And has that experience helped in your current role at Galaxy?

MAGEN: Oh, yeah, of course. For sure. It’s a nice additive to be able to understand what it is your customers really value and what it is that they need to support them in the classroom, from a teacher standpoint. And so, I think it does give us a unique perspective. In fact, we have a couple of additional team members here at Galaxy now that all came out of the school district or out of the classroom in some form. And so, it always gives us a little bit of a step above to be able



to relate to our end users still, and understand exactly what it is they do on a daily basis and how we can help them improve what they’re trying to achieve.

S4L: Yeah, I feel like being a teacher is one of those things where you really don’t understand what they’re doing and what they go through every day unless you’ve done it yourself.

MAGEN: It really is quite unbelievable. You know, I know things have changed. I’ve been out of the classroom...goodness, almost 20 years

“I would say 100 percent of our implementation comes from customers. Maybe not, you know, every request they make gets put into the development rack. But we really try to focus any and all new product development on customer feedback. I mean, they’re the ones that are in the trenches using it every day. They know what they need; they know how it should work. And so, we try to stay with that heartbeat of theirs in order to figure out, you know, where our team directionally should be going.”

now. So I can’t imagine what they’ve been dealing with in the past couple years, especially with the pandemic and everything else. But most definitely: Unless you’ve been in that classroom with those 30 eight-year-olds, you have no idea what the expectations are on those teachers, day in and day out.

S4L: I know that you and I have briefly worked together before, a couple times. We did an interview last October for a *Spaces4Learning* story about one of the products that we’re going to talk about later, G2 Secure. And then, just recently, you also contributed an article to our January/February 2022 issue of *Campus Security & Life Safety*. But for our listeners, can you tell us a little bit about just who is Galaxy Next Generation? And can you talk about the technology that you provide primarily to schools?

MAGEN: Yeah, certainly! And we do appreciate your partnership and the work that we’ve done together in the past, so thank you for that. So, Galaxy as a whole...you know, we are an educational technology company, and a lot of people kind of misconceive that to mean specifically K–12 or specifically schools. But we provide technology that supports any type of education, any type of learning. The company

started focused on interactive flat panels, so that was our core product back in 2015, 2016. And even into 2018, that was really the only product we sold. And if you’re familiar with the older, smartboard-type technology in classrooms, interactive panels just were the next evolution in front-of-the-classroom-type teaching. And so, we did develop our own brand. We started the company based around that.

And since then, we really have taken a step back and tried to figure out what other products round out not just our company portfolio (to make sense from a revenue and profitability standpoint), but what otherwise are we missing in the classroom? What other gaps can we fill in terms of assisting teachers and students and even administration? And so, since then, we’ve made a couple of acquisitions. And we’ve done some internal development on some new products. And now, we offer not just the interactive flat panels, but we have classroom audio solutions: the G2 Secure platform, which is based heavily around our bell-paging and intercom software, G2 Communicator. And so, we really do have a line card that fits almost every technological need that would go into a school and/or classroom to enhance that community and learning environment as much as possible.

S4L: I’ve been curious just about the name, “Galaxy Next Generation.” I’ve seen the company referred to alternatively as “Galaxy Next Generation” or “G2.” Are those two interchangeable? Or is there a difference between “Galaxy Next Generation” and “G2”?

MAGEN: Yeah, they really are interchangeable. I mean, “Galaxy Next Generation, Inc.,” of course, is our legal entity name. “G2” came about—the “2” representing, you know, that next-generation-type mentality; the “G,” obviously representing “Galaxy” to shorten us so that we could represent ourselves in a better brand footprint. You know, “Galaxy Next Generation” is a little bit of a lengthy name when we’re trying to put it in print and really get our brand out there. So, “G2” really represents the brands that we’re building, and “Galaxy,” of course, being the legal entity.

S4L: G2 also recently won a *Spaces4Learning* New Product Award in the Safety and Security Emergency Communication category. The product that you submitted was the G2 Visual Alert System. Can you tell us a little bit about this product, and what problem is it solving for the Ed Tech industry?

MAGEN: Yes, Visual Alerts actually came about from a customer request. So, we’ve been in the bell paging and intercom business since our acquisition of an audio company in 2019. And we had a customer that was fully using all of our BPI—bell paging/intercom—solutions and had transitioned their service from on-premise servers to our new cloud-based solution. And they came to us one day, it was like, “Hey, you know, it’d be really great if, when we did an intercom announcement, we could somehow visually make that message appear on the screens—the interactive panels throughout the school.” And so, we took that to the development team. And within weeks,

they had a solution in order to not only make an audible intercom call, but also send a visual notification to the interactive panels.

And then, from there, it was just kind of one of those lightbulb moments where we said, “Hey, if we have this backbone in Communicator that’s able to do that, why don’t we create Visual Alerts in its own entity?” We can put it on any device and send out any type of announcement and/or alert during the school day so that we could transition and use it for emergency purposes, as well. And so that’s really the evolution of it.

And of course, now, today, visual alerts can be sent to any Android, iOS, Mac OS, Windows, Linux, Chrome, you know, any device in that school building can receive a visual text message, basically—a message that pops up, takes over the screen, and lets everyone in the building know that there is a message for them to read. And that could be anything from, you know—lockdown, lockout, intruder in the building, hurricane warning, all the way down to something basic, like “Please don’t forget the pep rally Friday afternoon after school.” And so, it’s not just for emergency communication, although we see it being used more in those scenarios. It is just a visual portion of our bell paging and intercom system. That was something we already had basically in our portfolio, and just had to take time to tweak the development of the audible piece so that we could include both. And that’s really where it came from and why it was able to go to market so quickly on that side, too.

S4L: How often do you—I guess, for lack of a better word, how often do you take requests? How often do you take a piece of advice or a piece of feedback from a customer and really implement that into a product?

MAGEN: I mean, I would say 100 percent of our implementation comes



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from customers. Maybe not, you know, every request they make gets put into the development rack. But we really try to focus any and all new product development on customer feedback. I mean, they’re the ones that are in the trenches using it every day. They know what they need; they know how it should work. And so, we try to stay with that heartbeat of theirs in order to figure out, you know, where our team directionally should be going. And so, we do roundtable-type discussions. We do reach out; we have them on some of our development calls. Our customers have been part of pretty much every new product launch that we’ve enabled since the beginning of Galaxy.

S4L: Visual Alerts is also now part of a larger solution called G2 Secure. What makes this product unique, and then what was Galaxy’s direction with the new developments?

MAGEN: Again, this kind of came out of...well, okay, so we developed G2 Visual Alerts, and it had so much positive response from the market. It was almost like everyone was just

waiting on a product like that to be able to implement without a bunch of third-party hardware and appliances that would be needed. And so we thought, well, if we were able to satisfy need so quickly with Visual Alerts, what else can Communicator do? Which is the BPI software, the driving force behind it all—what else can Communicator do to help in an emergency situation? If just creating a visual messaging component, was that impactful? What else can we do to help schools react in those situations?

And so, we looked at a couple of other options. And we really did focus in our research, got with a bunch of thought leaders in the industry, attended some specific trade shows for campus-security-type solutions. And at the end of the day, there were kind of three big things that needed to take place in an event of an emergency in a school building. And that was communication, lockdown and first responder communication.

And so, we had already established the first box; we have the bell paging intercom, we can do the audible

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communication. Now we had the visual communication. We were able to partner with a company called HAVENLock and implement the ability to lock and unlock the classroom doors through Communicator—so all done, still, through the same system, and so that we were able to create safe zones immediately once those visual alerts were sent. And then also using Communicator, we were able to create a chat with first responders.

And so, all still stemming off of the development of Visual Alerts, we took step two and three and implemented it all into one touch of a button within our web UI, or now our mobile app, which is launching next week. And we’re able to lock down an entire school building and initiate that communication with first responders right away. And that’s something that no other product in our industry is able to do at this point with one solution. And so, we really felt like giving that school the option to implement one product, one company, and have all that available was pretty powerful and impactful.

S4L: In kind of the shortest form, those are kind of the big basics of it right? Creating a safe haven for students; the internal communication aspect of making sure that everybody in the building knows that there’s an active shooter; and then the external communication aspect of communicating with first responders. That kind of covers everything, doesn’t it?

MAGEN: Yeah, you got it. Those

were the three core components of G2 Secure, and also the core components and feedback that we received during our research of what needed to happen right away so that we can make the safest environment possible in a scary situation.

S4L: The title of this episode of the podcast is “Simply Speak.” Could you elaborate a little bit on what that means and where it came from?

MAGEN: Yeah, absolutely. So, Galaxy’s also made classroom audio amplification systems for a few years. We have a couple OEM partners that we manufacture classroom audio products for. And this year, we decided that it made sense to finally bring a classroom audio solution under the G2 brand, especially with the launch of G2 Secure and really needing something in the teacher’s classroom that they could use during that emergency response time. And so, “Simply Speak” is referring to the fact that our classroom audio amplification system has a teacher microphone that allows for an emergency button to be pressed. And all of those previously mentioned G2 Secure options go into effect.

So from the lay perspective, right, as a teacher, I’m walking around the classroom, I’m teaching my kids, something happens, an emergency situation goes into effect. I can simply take my fingers, press two buttons on my teacher microphone, and initiate a lockdown, visual alert, lock my door, and get those first responders involved. Basically like having an intercom console hanging around my neck, or

a telephone hanging around my neck, so that I’m right in the mix when I need to be. And so, G2 Link, which is our classroom audio solution, it can be sold just like any other classroom audio solutions that have been on the market for several years. Ours is just specifically designed by us, obviously. So we wanted to make sure that it had that emergency integration into it, so that it was just another addition to the security solutions that we had started providing last year.



GX Amp



GX Teacher Mic



GX Student Mic

S4L: I'm kind of just asking this out of my own curiosity. Obviously, in a situation like a lockdown or an active shooter, it needs to be as easy as possible for certain procedures to get initiated. But have there ever been any cases where it's almost too easy? Where a student is kind of wandering around the classroom, they press two buttons on the technology on the teacher's desk, and all of a sudden, the whole school's in lockdown?

MAGEN: Yeah, so thankfully, it's all handled by credentials, and there is an approval process that has to take place. So, the student microphones do not have the ability to send that emergency call. The teacher microphones do; it is a long-hold press. So, it's intended to be a thoughtful process. You can't just walk by, hit a button accidentally, you know, send an emergency notification. You have to press and hold two buttons for X amount of seconds in order to have that call sent. And then, that call is sent still to the administration of the building, which has to approve the request, basically, in order to go into lockdown.

So, if you could think about it almost like a two-step authentication that you're used to using on any other mobile device or computer at this point, it's a little bit more complicated than just a subtle brush-by of a button in order to prevent exactly what you just mentioned—not having accidental emergency alerts being sent.

S4L: Could we talk a little bit about the G2 Link system? How does it integrate into the seamless communication plan within schools?

MAGEN: Yeah, so as I mentioned briefly a while ago, G2 Link is our classroom audio system. And so, in the classroom, it's still just that basic teacher amplification device. So, teacher wears a microphone around their neck, you have an amplifier in the classroom for speakers in the ceiling

or on the wall, depending on their configuration. So, there's tons of data out there talking about why leveled hearing throughout the classroom is important for student engagement. And that, at its core, is what G2 Link is. It's a classroom teacher amplification voice lift. There's several different words that people refer to it for student achievement and engagement.

We make these products, right? We develop them ourselves, they're assembled here in the U.S. And so, we're able to be nimble and flexible with what we want it to do. And so, once we knew we wanted an audio product, we automatically knew it had to be integrated with the other solutions. And so that's where we really took the technology within the microphone itself and made it integrated into the G2 Secure notification, so that the teacher would be able to initiate some sort of SIP call or an intercom call, depending on how you want to refer to it, into the office. So that they have immediate connection to someone without having to walk over to a telephone or find their closest intercom console. And, really, just untethering her/him from certain parts of the classroom and having that communication around their neck, as if they were just constantly connected to the front office. And giving them security to focus on teaching and not worry about, "What if something happens and I don't have any way to get that message out?"

And so, that's really the most important factor. I mean, I think all day long, we get requests, obviously, for just classroom audio. And that's 1,000 percent fantastic for G2 Link, too. I think that school districts that already have implemented some sort of classroom audio solution should consider how that will eventually affect the integration into their other platforms. And so, we're just trying to create—ahead of time—a solution to fit

all those needs.

S4L: It sounds like the G2 Communicator is a really, really powerful engine. What can we expect next from the G2 development team?

MAGEN: That's kind of interesting. Actually, I had a really good call with a new reseller the other day, and their focus was mostly on commercial buildings. So, you know, nowadays, you walk into a big office building, and all the blinds and lights and everything else is all automated, right? So, the conversation quickly led to, you know, can Communicator control all this, too? If Communicator is able to lock my doors, and it's able to send a message to my panel, and it's able to send audio through my amplifier, you know, what is it not able to do?

And the truth of the matter is, as

Introducing **G2 LINK**, the Classroom Audio System that enhances teacher communication and student engagement both in the classroom and throughout the school community. Simply speak into G2 LINK's teacher microphone and increase your student's achievement. G2 LINK is your connection to communicating in and outside the walls of your classroom. Access the front office, enable your daily communications campus-wide or initiate an emergency alert...all with the touch of a button on your teacher microphone. G2 LINK can be sold as a stand-alone classroom audio amplification system or as an integral part of G2 Secure. Email sales@galaxynext.us for more information today!



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long as it is talking to an IP endpoint—something that has an Ethernet or a networked device—then we can essentially control it. And so, I think Communicator’s future is trying to figure out what else in the school can we get access to, in order to make the admin and/or teacher life a little bit easier? Kind of like a “one throat to choke” kind of mentality, in terms of all of your IP endpoints being able to lead back to a very simple software platform that gives you access into all those classrooms—whether it be cameras, audio, security, visual, lockdown, doors, you know, the whole nine yards. And so, our team is constantly just kind of evolving, and keeping their ear to the street to try to figure out, you know, what is the most important aspect in that classroom next? And I think Communicator will continue to

evolve constantly. Continual updates.

S4L: The last time we had talked, in October, we were talking about G2 Secure, and it was kind of on the cusp of release. It was going to be ready in time for the second half of the 2021–2022 school year. Is that now available?

MAGEN: Yeah. So, it is, and we haven’t done our formal formal launch yet. We’re attending FETC next week in Orlando, and that will be the first time some of our end users will get to see the fully integrated solution. And so, it is available, and I guess by the time this podcast gets released, it will definitely be out there and for the customers to see. So, we’re excited to get that feedback next week. And G2 Link also will make its debut at FETC. So, both of these products will be there and officially launched Tuesday of next week.

S4L: Wow, this is a big week. It looks like that was about everything that we’d had prepared. Were there any last words or last thoughts that you’d like to get in before we sign off?

MAGEN: No, I mean, I think for us, it’s just wanting to make sure that the clients and educators and thought leaders in the Ed Tech industry understand, really, what Galaxy is about. And at the end of the day, we’re about the students and trying to make sure that they have what they need to be successful in the classroom, at home, hybrid—you know, safe, secure, they can go to school and just focus on learning. Teachers can go to school and just focus on teaching, and admin can go and just focus on leading. And I think if we can achieve that, then we’ve done what we’ve set out to do.