



Cost-Effective and Productivity Enhancing Improvements to the Metropolitan Community College's Messaging Infrastructure

Background

Metropolitan Community College of Kansas City, MO, consists of six separate campuses across Kansas City with a total of close to 6,000 faculty and staff and about 25,000 students. The MCC has been recognized throughout the USA for the excellence and innovation of the academic programs. Students enrolled in a college program are granted an academic email account, which is kept active indefinitely, as students often come back to school at a later period in their lives. Because of their "email for life" approach, the College has over 125,000 student accounts. A fifth of the accounts belong to the active student population, while the rest are addresses of former students.

As the Metropolitan Community College has grown, the IT Department has made a few strategic decisions aimed at simplifying email management and reducing the cost associated with it.

Reasons for the Platform Migration to Microsoft Exchange

Over the past several years, MCC has introduced some changes to its messaging infrastructure in order to best serve its students and academic and administrative staff while at the same time utilizing its IT budget in the most efficient manner.

As a first step towards optimized IT operations, the hundreds of thousands of student emails were outsourced to the cloud. Only the academic and administrative staff remained on the email system in-house. A significant change to that system was the migration from a Novell GroupWise to a Microsoft Exchange environment.

According to Brad Frisch, Network Engineer and the messaging expert at the MCC, there were serious issues from an engineering point of view that called for an email platform switch. Specifically, the MCC IT department wasn't in sync with Novell's strategic direction towards Linux. "For us, it meant being forced to move from Netware to Linux. In other words, the staff had to undergo extensive retraining in Linux and we didn't have the time to invest in it."

"We wanted to move to industry standards. With GroupWise, there were serious integration issues," says Gary Schieber, Director of Computer Services. "We were buying hardware solutions to try to integrate different applications in the Novell environment whereas with the majority of applications come integrated with Active Directory out of the box."

"Unfortunately, there aren't that many solutions that provide the same level of integration with Novell," adds Frisch. "This meant that in many cases we needed to either find a Novell-specific solution, if it existed, or more often than not come up with patched, band-aid solutions that in the end were very labor intensive. We had to do a lot of development on the back-end to get these work-arounds functional."

Overview

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Critical Requirements

A solution to enable MCC to migrate its users and data to Exchange at a pace that would have minimal impact on end users and remain useful within the College's new email system after the migration

Another reason that further pushed the IT Department towards an Exchange migration, according to Schieber, had to do with the feedback from their users: "End users weren't happy with the GroupWise client. In my opinion, GroupWise is not very user-friendly and requires additional effort in accomplishing the same actions that you do with a single click in Outlook."

"In the end, for us it made more sense to make a considerable investment in an email platform migration than to continue managing a complex messaging infrastructure that required a lot of additional effort to be fully functional," Schieber is convinced.

The decision for the migration to Exchange was finalized in the spring of 2009 and planning began. "There was a lot of research we had to do as a first step," recalls Frisch. "We had to determine the hardware we were going to need and detail the plan for successfully migrating over to Exchange.

Migrating Users and Data from GroupWise to Exchange with M+Archive

MCC and Messaging Architects have had a long-standing relationship that dates back to the days when the College's messaging infrastructure ran on Netware and Netmail and was protected by M+Guardian.

When Frisch brought up the fact that the school had decided to undergo an email platform migration, he was pleasantly surprised that Messaging Architects' M+Archive offered him and his team a migration solution that would be able to take the data from GroupWise and inject it into the new Exchange server. After the migration, M+Archive would continue to be useful within the new email environment as a policy-based archiving solution.

"Messaging Architects came and did a demo of how M+Archive would handle the moving of data from the old GroupWise system to the new Exchange system. We liked the approach; moreover, we already had a relationship with the company and that was important."

Once MCC decided to proceed with the migration using M+Archive, Frisch went on to set up the new Exchange system which was going to co-exist with the old GroupWise system while users were being migrated.

M+Archive handled the creation of users on the new Exchange system through an automated process. The more serious challenge came with the migration of the data, in particular the consolidation of the end users' personal archives.

"The problem wasn't the data on the live GroupWise system," Frisch explains. "We have a policy that deletes email after 120 days, so most users also kept personal archives on the network. In some cases these archives were 3 or 4 GBs. In short, there was a lot of data to be moved."

Frisch worked with the desktop support teams for each campus to ensure that all user data that had to be migrated was on the College's network. "Even though there were several campuses involved, the consolidation of the data went amazingly well," confirms Frisch.

The Messaging Architects professional services team guided Frisch through the actual migration process. A migration policy was set up in M+Archive to migrate the data of all six thousand users in portions after hours every night over a period of time. "Considering how complex such a project can be, overall the migration with M+Archive was successful and painless," says Frisch.

Benefits of the Chosen Migration Path

For Brad Frisch the key benefit of doing the migration with M+Archive is in the usefulness of the solution after the migration was completed: "When we started planning for the migration, we evaluated several migration tools that were available. The huge benefit of going with M+Archive is the fact that the product has a life in our messaging infrastructure after the migration. All the other tools we looked at became dead in the water as soon as the migration was completed. We wanted something that we could use in the future rather than spend an extravagant amount of money for one little migration and then not be able to use it ever again. Going forward, we are going to use M+Archive as an archiving solution to help us meet the retention mandates that open records legislation requires."

Another important benefit that both Gary Schieber and Brad Frisch highlight is the level of client care the organization receives from Messaging Architects. "The support team is great – our designated support engineer is responsive and friendly. And our account executive has made it very clear that we are a valued client. And this really makes a difference," they both conclude.

