



Microsoft Online Services Customer Solution Case Study



Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Professional services—
Environmental engineering

Customer Profile

Clean Power Research delivers software tools and services for the objective economic analysis of clean energy technologies. The company's main offices are in Napa, California, and Kirkland, Washington.

Business Situation

The company wanted to replace its POP3-based e-mail with an enterprise-class messaging system, but without the expense and overhead of an internally deployed and managed IT infrastructure.

Solution

The company started using the Business Productivity Online Suite from Microsoft® Online Services, replacing its relatively slow and inefficient POP3-based e-mail system with Microsoft Exchange Online.

Benefits

- User productivity is enhanced
- Integrated calendars assist planning
- Mobile access provides greater flexibility
- Online services support growth

Growing Firm Uses Microsoft Online Services to Enhance Its Messaging Capabilities

“The Business Productivity Online Suite from Microsoft Online Services is helping us create and deliver the kind of products and services that you would expect from a much larger company.”

Thomas Hoff, President and Founder, Clean Power Research

Clean Power Research is a small but growing firm that wanted enterprise-class messaging features that were not available in its POP3-based e-mail, such as integrated and shared calendars, easy mobile access to messages, and fast e-mail performance. However, the firm, which has people working in several U.S. states, wanted to avoid the cost and overhead involved owning its own enterprise messaging infrastructure. Clean Power turned to the Business Productivity Online Suite from Microsoft® Online Services, using Microsoft Exchange Online to replace its inefficient POP3-based system. The result is greater user productivity, better efficiency in setting up meetings and conference calls, and a scalable e-mail system that can accommodate the company's growth.

Situation

Clean Power Research provides software and consulting services that are used for analyzing the economics of installing and running clean energy technologies, such as photovoltaic panels, wind power, solar thermal systems, and fuel cells. The firm's customers range from home owners to large utilities to state governments and the U.S. Department of Energy, who use Clean Power software and services to understand and manage the issues and processes surrounding clean energy, such as cost/benefit analysis and incentive program operations.

Clean Power is headquartered in Napa, California, but its employees and full-time contract consultants operate in multiple locations across California and in other states, including, Washington, and New York, Minnesota, and North Carolina. The dispersed work force relies extensively on e-mail communications. For years, the company's e-mail—a POP3-based e-mail system—was provided by an external Internet service provider.

"The company started in 1998 and it was an e-mail system that we grew up with," says Thomas Hoff, President and Founder of Clean Power Research. "We got by, but over time we realized that this type of e-mail setup could not deliver the productivity features and efficiency that a growing company like ours needs. It did not have the kind of integration and synchronization that enterprises typically enjoy, such as integrated calendars, shared contacts, fast e-mail performance, and the ability to log on to a messaging network using mobile devices."

With demand for its software and services increasing rapidly, Hoff and others at the company recognized that the e-mail system could not scale effectively to keep up with the firm's growth. They needed an enterprise-

level e-mail system. But the company—which has a goal of growing the business while keeping staff levels lean—did not want to add employees and related resources and overhead simply to manage the servers and software needed for running an enterprise-class messaging infrastructure.

Solution

Clean Power decided that the best way to implement enterprise-level messaging while minimizing additional cost and IT resources was to use Microsoft® Exchange Online, part of the Business Productivity Online Suite from Microsoft Online Services. Exchange Online is a Microsoft-hosted enterprise messaging solution based on Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 that provides Clean Power with powerful, integrated e-mail features typically found in large organizations. Exchange Online includes virus and spam filtering and mobile e-mail via Exchange ActiveSync®.

"We looked at other hosted services for Exchange Server, but felt that Microsoft provided the most compelling offering," says Hoff. "Microsoft is experienced in running high-availability systems, which is what we need. And it obviously has the greatest amount of experience in developing and tightly integrating new messaging features into Exchange Server. Furthermore, our experience with Microsoft products has been positive."

The company is also evaluating the use of Microsoft Office SharePoint® Online, another offering in the Business Productivity Online Suite that provides collaboration capabilities such as intranet portals, document sharing, content and workflow management, and site searches.

Clean Power signed up for the Business Productivity Online Suite in early 2008. The migration to the Exchange Online from the old ISP-based e-mail infrastructure went quickly

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Thomas Hoff, President and Founder,
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and smoothly, taking only a few days to get the first users online. “The interface provided by the Business Productivity Online Suite and the process of adding users and assigning licenses was all very straightforward,” Hoff says. The deployment of the new messaging system included a slight change in the company’s e-mail domain name, but e-mail traffic was not interrupted; all e-mail sent to the old domain name is simply forwarded to the company’s new messaging system.

Benefits

By choosing the Business Productivity Online Suite, Clean Power has dramatically increased the effectiveness of its messaging infrastructure, providing an enterprise-level e-mail system for the growing company. With Exchange Online, user productivity is improved because e-mail now moves much faster between the geographically dispersed staff, helping to speed decision making and improve responsiveness to customers. Clean Power employees benefit from the integrated calendaring available in Exchange Online because they can plan meetings, conference calls, and other collaborative tasks more efficiently. Users with mobile devices can now access their e-mail, calendars, contacts, and other messaging functions from any location where they have a good wireless signal.

The company as a whole also benefits from a messaging system that can deliver “big company” benefits, including scalability, with almost none of the cost and personnel overhead that would be required to internally deploy and manage a server-based system.

User Productivity Is Enhanced

The speed of e-mail messages is noticeably improved with Microsoft Exchange Online, which saves time and leads to greater productivity for Clean Power users throughout the day. “We really benefit from faster e-mail delivery, with messages arriving just as fast as they would if we had an enterprise system

installed on a local area network,” says Hoff. “We do a lot of telephone conferencing with people sitting at their PCs. If we’re having an internal conference call or an unscheduled meeting with a client and need to send a document for review, no one wants to wait minutes for the message to arrive. With Microsoft Exchange Online, e-mail messages are now delivered very, very quickly—almost like instant messaging.”

Junk mail is also greatly reduced through Exchange Hosted Filtering, which is provided with the Business Productivity Online Suite.

“The spam filtering performed by Exchange Hosted Filtering is so much better than what we had with our ISP-based system that there’s really no comparison,” says Hoff. This is a huge benefit to productivity because it means we don’t have to weed out junk mail before getting to the important stuff.”

Company users also benefit from the indexing of e-mail; because all e-mails are kept in a central Exchange Server database, users can quickly find particular messages by entering a search word or phrase.

Integrated Calendars Assist Planning

Another significant benefit of Exchange Online is integrated calendars. “The integrated calendaring in Microsoft Exchange Online is important for us,” says Hoff. “Before, we would have to call or send an e-mail message first to find out if someone was available in a particular time slot. Now we can view each others’ calendars online to see if and when someone is available. And just as important, it also gives us a deeper sense of what everyone else is doing—for example, this person is writing code between 9 AM and 1 PM, or that person is in a meeting with a client. With the integrated calendaring in Microsoft Exchange Online, we have better insight into what is going on each day in the company.”

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Hoff notes that being able to see other calendars will become increasingly important as the company brings on more employees. “There will be a point where it would be nearly impossible to coordinate schedules among large groups of people without having all of our calendars viewable online. The integrated calendars will help us as we grow.”

Mobile Access Provides Greater Flexibility

Exchange Online supports mobile access to e-mail, calendars, and contacts using mobile devices or Microsoft Office Outlook® Web Access from any Internet connection, so Clean Power staff members can stay in touch while out of the office.

“We have users with different types of mobile devices, and the ability to use smartphones is important for us,” says Hoff. “The mobile access supported by Microsoft Exchange Online lets our users step out of the office but still stay on top of their e-mail, schedules, and contacts. This allows us to step away from our offices and still stay in touch with colleagues, customers, and schedules.”

Clean Power employees also benefit from “push” e-mail, a feature that sends messages directly—and on a regular schedule—to mobile devices without requiring any manual synchronization steps by the user. “The push e-mail feature available in Exchange Online means that our users don’t have to synchronize through a desktop connection to get their mail or updated calendars or contacts,” Hoff says. “It helps users stay focused on their work.”

Online Services Support Growth

Microsoft Online Services is also valuable for the future of Clean Power, which can expand its messaging infrastructure without having to hire internal IT resources to manage it.

“We’ll be using Microsoft Office SharePoint Online as a global repository for specifications, contracts, various documents, and employee handbooks,” Hoff says. “It’s another way in which we expect to grow our company with the help of Microsoft hosted software. The Business Productivity Online Suite from Microsoft Online Services is helping us create and deliver the kind of products and services that you would expect from a much larger company.”

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to: www.microsoft.com

For more information about Clean Power Research products and services, visit the Web site at: www.cleanpower.com

Microsoft Online Services

Microsoft Online Services is a business-class communications and collaboration software offering delivered as a subscription service, hosted by Microsoft and sold with partners. These services help make it easier for customers to rapidly and cost-effectively access the most up-to-date technologies, and are designed for rapid deployment to provide customers with streamlined communications, simplified management, and business-class reliability and security.

For IT staff, Microsoft Online Services helps reduce the burden of performing routine IT management tasks such as installation, provisioning, ongoing maintenance, patches, updates and upgrades. This makes it possible for them to spend more time on initiatives that move the business forward. These services are backed by strong service level agreements (SLAs) and are designed to meet the regulatory compliance and reliability needs of enterprise customers. On a technical level, the services boast the sophistication and reliability that customers expect from Microsoft, which continues to invest heavily in building data centers to support these services.

For more information, visit: www.microsoft.com/online

Software and Services

- Services
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 - Microsoft Office SharePoint Online
 - Microsoft Exchange Hosted Filtering