Online Services Delivers Enterprise-Class Communications to Growing Retail Business

Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Retail

Customer Profile

Archiver's consists of 45 retail stores across the United States, where customers can design and create materials in which to keep and display their photographs and other keepsakes.

Business Situation

Archiver's wanted to migrate from its old POP3-based e-mail system to an enterprise class messaging and collaboration system, but the cost and in-house IT resource requirements were too great.

Solution

By subscribing to Microsoft Online Services, Archiver's immediately gained access to the enterprise-class e-mail capabilities it wanted—without the need for in-house infrastructure or additional support.

Benefits

- Rapid access to enterprise-class services
- No need for on-premises infrastructure
- Reduces burden on IT support
- Low monthly subscription fee
- Increased efficiency

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>
> Dave Bardwell, System Administrator, Archiver's

Archiver's had established 45 retail outlets across the United States in less than eight years. But with that expansion came natural growing pains. The company's POP3-based e-mail system no longer suited the enterprise into which Archiver's was evolving. At the same time, Archiver's was not in a position to migrate to Microsoft® Exchange Server 2007, much as its executives wanted to. Building an on-premises infrastructure would be costly, and Archiver's three-person IT team did not have the time or the resources to support it. Archiver's turned to Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Virteva, which introduced them to the Business Productivity Online Suite from Microsoft Online Services. By subscribing to Microsoft Exchange Online, Archiver's gained the enterprise-class features and services it needed without the cost of building—or the burden of managing—in-house infrastructure.

Situation

Many growing organizations have limited IT resources, and the personnel they have are usually totally committed to supporting the mission-critical applications that keep these companies growing. Could these organizations work better? More efficiently? Often these overtaxed IT teams do not have time to answer questions about improving organizational communication and collaboration, let alone figure out how to implement technologies that could improve productivity.

This was the case with Archiver's, the photo memory store. Archiver's three IT professionals spend the majority of their time supporting the complex point of sale (POS) infrastructure that links its 45 stores across the United States with its corporate headquarters in Minnetonka, Minnesota. The team had additional challenges on top of the point of sale system: Maintaining the wide area network linking the stores, remotely administering and troubleshooting as many as six PCs in each store, supporting the information workers and executives at headquarters who worked with Microsoft Dynamics® GP, and more.

As a consequence of these priorities, calls by Archiver's business executives for an enterprise-class messaging and collaboration system remained largely unanswered for several years. Archiver's had relied on a POP3-based e-mail system supported by a local Internet service provider since its inception in 1999, and everyone knew that the corporation had outgrown that system.

"A lot of our people came from large companies, and one of the first questions they asked was *'What do you mean I can't have shared calendars?'"* remembers Dave Bardwell, a system administrator at Archiver's. "And there were more questions: *'What do you mean there's no global address*

book? ' 'Why can't I access my mail easily from home?'"

The challenge was what to grow into, and how? Every year, Bardwell and his team would briefly revisit the idea of migrating Archiver's to Microsoft Exchange Server—and then abandon the idea. As attractive and compelling as the features of Exchange Server are, Archiver's did not have the capital budget to build a highly reliable, redundant infrastructure to support an in-house deployment of Exchange Server. Moreover, Bardwell and his IT team were quick to point out that they did not have the resources to support such an infrastructure even if the company could have afforded it.

Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Virteva, though, could see a way through this challenge. Virteva was already supporting Archiver's IT team on a Microsoft Active Directory® project, and when Virteva executives introduced Bardwell to the Business Productivity Online Suite from Microsoft Online Services, Bardwell knew that this was precisely the approach that Archiver's needed.

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Solution

The Business Productivity Online Suite from Microsoft Online Services includes Microsoft Exchange Online, Office Live Meeting, Microsoft Office Communications Online, and Microsoft SharePoint® Online. Microsoft Online Services hosts this enterprise software, which it offers to organizations around the world on a subscription basis through a network of partner resellers such as Virteva.

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By subscribing to Microsoft Online Services, an organization such as Archiver's can gain access to a wide range of enterprise-class services—including desktop and mobile e-mail, shared calendaring and contacts, instant messaging, presence, audio/video conferencing, shared workspaces and Web-conferencing—without having to host or support these services. Microsoft hosts and maintains the servers in its own data centers and supports the infrastructure with its own staff of experts, so Archiver's does not need to make the capital investments in an on-premises infrastructure, and its IT staff does not need to maintain these services. Subscribers benefit from financially-backed service level agreements (SLAs) from Microsoft Online Services for availability and uptime, so Archiver's can rely on these services to deliver the enterprise-class communication and collaboration capabilities they need.

Virteva helped Archiver's migrate from its POP3 mail system to Microsoft Exchange Online. It coordinated with Microsoft to set up the accounts for 150 Archiver's users, and it made sure that those Archiver's users who needed to use the Microsoft Office Outlook® 2007 client had it properly installed and configured. Virteva made sure that those users who would be using Outlook Web Access (OWA) were properly configured to support that Web-based client. Virteva also developed training courses and materials for Archiver's, and it set up a help desk that Archiver's users could call if they had questions about how to accomplish something in the new configuration.

In September 2008, after less than two weeks of preparation, Archiver's cut over to Exchange Online. Users' old mail files were archived but accessible—their new mail began arriving through Exchange Online. What was obvious to users was not that the messages looked different or that their

inboxes did not reside locally—it was that they could set up meetings easily using shared calendars and that they had could contact employees and suppliers easily using a shared global address book. What was obvious to Bardwell and his IT team was that they no longer had to take time to chase down problems with the old POP3 system or help users transfer .PST files from their desktop systems to their laptop systems in order to work at home. With e-mail residing "in the cloud," Archiver's users could access it from anywhere, without contacting him first.

"The migration really was seamless to our users," says Bardwell. "We worked with Virteva behind scenes to upgrade the desktop clients where appropriate, but other than new versions of Outlook for some users, that was as much as they noticed. When we switched over, our users' e-mail was there and waiting for them."

Benefits

For Archiver's, migrating to Exchange Online is delivering many benefits. Employees at Archiver's are able to work more efficiently because it takes much less time to schedule meetings using shared calendar services. They can also access their e-mail from anywhere, without having to reconfigure their systems and mail files to do so. Virteva's Henderson notes that the Archiver's IT team now has more time to support other IT activities at Archiver's—including looking at other technologies that might be useful to the company that previously it had not had time to explore.

Streamlined Communications

Exchange Online provides Archiver's with a true enterprise-class messaging and collaboration solution. Without having to rely on a patchwork of communication software, users can communicate quickly and easily. Business decision makers can schedule meetings easily because of the shared

calendar, which for Archiver's makes a world of difference.

"A lot of my staff came from other companies where they used Exchange," says Brian Olmstead, Executive Vice President of Archiver's. "We have a lot of interaction between our marketing and merchandising departments, and we've had a lot of frustration in the past. Setting up meetings was very cumbersome—we would send e-mail messages back and forth and back and forth to find a time for everyone to meet. The shared calendars in Exchange Online make it a lot easier."

Simplified Management

Relying on Microsoft Online Services to host and maintain the Exchange Online infrastructure also makes life easier for Archiver's three-person IT department. Bardwell and his team have not had to build any infrastructure to support an in-house, enterprise-class Exchange Server environment. They have not had to take any time to manage or secure the servers, update the servers with patches and antivirus software, and manage all the complexities associated with supporting 150 users spread across 45 geographically dispersed sites. "With Microsoft Online Services," notes Walt Henderson, President and Founder of Virteva, "you have Microsoft personnel supporting these technologies. You don't get more qualified than that."

"Virteva didn't really even have to sell us on the strength of the Microsoft data centers or the expertise of the people supporting this infrastructure," says Bardwell. "Knowing that Microsoft was behind it, we were confident that they'd do it properly."

Microsoft Online Services would do it quickly, too. "Microsoft Online Services allowed us incredible agility," Bardwell goes on to say.

"We were able to roll out three applications to 45 stores in just three days. It was amazing."

For Bardwell and his team, the benefits of relying on Microsoft Online Services go beyond the work they have not had to do. They actually have less work to do now. "I can already see on the benefits on the administrative side," says Bardwell. "It used to be that I'd have to set up a new mail account with our ISP, install Outlook, configure it, instruct users how to work from home and how to change e-mail settings when they were on the road or coming back into the office. Now, we set up a mailbox and it is instantly available. Our users can work from anywhere and they don't have to change any settings—so they don't have to come to me. This is definitely going to ease the administrative overhead that I have experienced in the past."

Improved Efficiency

Reducing the day-to-day system administration burden from Archiver's IT team is proving to be one of the most significant benefits for Archiver's, because it gives Bardwell and his team the breathing room they need to step back and look at the company and its IT options. In conversations with Virteva, in taking a look at the other services available through Microsoft Online Services, Bardwell and Olmstead and others in the company are looking at new ways to conduct business more efficiently. It's not just the possibilities afforded by enterprise-class e-mail but the possibilities afforded by *all* the applications that Microsoft Online Services makes available for a low monthly fee.

"Archiver's has never taken advantage of tools such as Office Live Meeting in past," says Henderson, "but now they are looking to use Live Meeting to save costs. They're looking way beyond e-mail and thinking about how they will use some of the new

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"We're looking to distribute reports using SharePoint Online," adds Olmstead. "Instead of blasting a report out to 150 different mailboxes, we will be able to deliver it once to SharePoint Online where those people who need to see it can find it."

Indeed, Olmstead goes on to describe a scenario in which key managers, even those working from different locations, could more easily work through a complex report using Office Live Meeting, which Microsoft Online Services offers as part of the Business Productivity Online Suite. "We're an organization with a high number of SKUs," says Olmstead, "more than 15,000 in each store, and we have weekly and monthly calls in which we talk about sales details in depth. That's always been a very cumbersome call, because everyone has a paper copy of the report and the person leading the call always has to say, *'Now look at page x, line y, row z'* and hope that all the people on the call are following along. We would be able to manage those meetings much more efficiently if we could all look at a common copy of the report online using a tool like Live Meeting."

The efficiencies Archiver's anticipates achieving through the use of Microsoft Online Services do not stop at online meetings. Instead of training employees by sending out videos burned onto DVDs it may soon start using Live Meeting to deliver interactive training sessions. It may use SharePoint Online to archive presentations and equipment demonstrations that users can access whenever they want. This will reduce the costs associated with travel as well as the time and production costs associated with developing DVDs.

For Archiver's, the Business Productivity Online Suite from Microsoft Online Services is opening new doors, and through those doors Archiver's is starting to see a path to a new, more technically savvy organization. With enterprise-class software and services from Microsoft and ongoing support from Virteva, the photo memory store is well on its way to becoming the very picture of efficiency and technical sophistication.

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 Virteva products and services, call (952) 843-1200 or visit the Web site at:
www.virteva.com

For more information about Archiver's products and services, call (952) 516-3300 or visit the Web site at:
www.archiversonline.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, making it possible for them to spend more time on initiatives that move the business forward. These services are backed by strong 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:
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