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For Higher E-mail Availability Klamath County Deploys Microsoft Office 365

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Introduction:

Klamath County, Oregon is home to Crater Lake National Park, the Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway, and the city of Klamath Falls where the county government is based. Covering more than 6,000 square miles, the county is home to almost 70,000 residents. With a geographic footprint larger than many states, the county government employs almost 600 workers spread throughout the region who rely on e-mail and other online tools to communicate and share information. Additionally, the region's rugged climate poses challenges for the county's IT department, which is responsible for the organization's communications infrastructure. To address these issues, Klamath leaders looked to the cloud...and Microsoft Office 365.

Situation:

When the county's on-premise e-mail system needed upgrading, the IT department weighed the options of replacing it with new on premise servers or contracting with a service provider to deliver e-mail functionality over the Web. Maintaining its legacy e-mail system had occupied staff resources that the department could more productively use elsewhere. At the same time, the county's server-based system had not provided the level of reliability that the organization required.

"I look at our investment in IT as I would any other portfolio. How is an investment in technologies going to maximize the return to the county? Historically, I have found that it makes the most sense to bring in talent from outside for services that tend to be ubiquitous," explains Randy Paul, Director of Information Technology for Klamath County.

"It is much more economical to consider for outsourcing – or for not keeping on your in-house portfolio – those things that tend to be very generic, and e-mail definitely qualifies for that," he says. "It's something that everyone uses. The expectations are very similar across a vast array of organizations, and I think it's better to outsource something like that so you can invest more properly on the core competencies of the organization."

Solution:

Recently, Klamath implemented the Microsoft Office 365 cloud-based solution to provision its e-mail system on Exchange Online as well as accompanying applications such as SharePoint Online and Office productivity tools. Adopting this software as a service (SaaS) model for its most commonly used applications has allowed the county to reduce the costs and administrative burdens of running its own server-based e-mail system. As a result, the county's small IT department is better able to focus its resources on the organization's more demanding development projects.

"Basically, we had an on-premise Exchange Server that was in need of an upgrade and really needed also to be more available. We really needed to have proper three-nines of availability, not just for the e-mail server but for the whole messaging stack" says Paul. "So it was really a cost-of-ownership issue. Were we going to be able to get more bang for our buck by putting this in the cloud? The cloud happens to be the mechanism for how the service is delivered, but it really boils down to the cost savings of providing the service in-house versus outsourcing."

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The county purchased 450 seats on Office 365 primarily to provide e-mail functionality across the enterprise, but it also deployed the service's messaging and Office applications to many users as replacements for desktop versions.

"E-mail made the ROI argument for moving to the cloud," notes Paul. "In that e-mail stack I include archiving and spam filtering. But outside of that e-mail stack, the other messaging services – Lync messaging, SharePoint, and the Web apps – were really where we got a lot of added value."

Approximately 80 percent of the county's users are still using Microsoft Office applications on their desktops, but for remote and mobile users, accessing applications on the Web allows them to remain connected and productive away from their desks.

"The place where Web apps make a really good fit is for our mobile users that split their time between being remote users and being at a desk," says Paul. "So that really fits well with our law enforcement officers because they're out in the field a lot. And we have other types of users, like code inspectors, that are accessing messaging services from the Web because of the nature of their jobs."

Benefits:

Implementing e-mail and applications as Microsoft Office 365 services reduced the county's total cost of ownership for e-mail and eliminated the need for a large up-front capital investment in new infrastructure. Additionally Paul reports that his department's small staff of eight is better able to work on projects that more directly address the core competencies of his constituent agencies.

"The biggest benefit is that we're able to focus the staff we have. We've got more projects now than we have ever had before. By moving messaging to the cloud we're able to reposition our existing staff to projects that actually make sense," he says.

For the county's users, Office 365 provides functionality and features that they're already familiar with, reducing their learning curves and the need for training.

"Because the Office 365 apps are basically a Web version of the Office 2010 apps that we already own and use, it really makes a lot of sense keep that user interface consistent," Paul explains.

Providing Office 365 services to the county's agencies also helps the IT department to more transparently report costs to the county's leadership as well as to the agencies themselves.

"We actually re-bill the cost of those accounts to the constituent departments so they can actually see where their budget dollars are going," says Paul.

"During the times of tight budgets, everyone wants to see how their money's being spent. Now the departments can actually see – 'I have 15 e-mail accounts and it's costing me so much per month' – and we handle that billing for them. They're able to see exactly what those fees are going for."

Finally, the Office 365 service model allows the county to mitigate the financial and performance risks of interruptions to their e-mail availability. The hosted solution model comes with the service-level guarantees that the county was looking for. So if interruptions do occur, the county will be reimbursed for its downtime. Better yet,

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“Before, our IT organization was losing out in multiple ways when there was an outage,” he says. “Not only was everybody without service, but I was also forced to pay more money and allocate more resources to figure out how to bring the service back online. I was paying overtime and bringing contractors in and doing all sorts of things. By contrast, with this software-as-a-service model, I may be losing out if there’s an outage, but I’m not paying additionally to repair it. In fact, I pay less.”

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