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## **St. Augustine Beach Deploys Cloud-Based Email Using Microsoft Office 365**

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## St. Augustine Beach Deploys Cloud-Based Email

### Introduction:

With a population of more than 6,000 residents, the City of St. Augustine Beach is located in north eastern Florida’s St. Johns County. The city government’s IT department supports almost 50 end users, including City commissioners, the City Manager’s office, the Building Department, the Public Works Department, as well as law enforcement officers. The City recently replaced its legacy email service with a cloud-based system hosted on Microsoft Office 365 and Exchange Online. As a result, the City was able to upgrade its enterprise email capabilities at much lower cost than on-premise email systems, while also avoiding the administrative burdens associated with installing physical server-based systems.

### Situation

In September 2011, the City of St. Augustine migrated from a variety of legacy Web-based email services offered by different vendors to an enterprise-class, cloud-based solution provided by Microsoft Office 365 and Exchange Online.

Using the consumer-oriented legacy Web-based email service did not provide enterprise-level functionality or reliability, recalls Anthony Johns, IT Specialist with the City of St. Augustine Beach. “We were looking for reliability, as we’d had some issues with that in the past,” he says.

“As we evaluated alternatives to the various email systems we initially considered having our own physical email server installed in the building,” says Johns. “We currently have a 2003 Small Business Server set up, and we were using Exchange built into that partially. I say partially because we didn’t have enough storage space to keep everyone’s email, so were working with a mixed solution.”

“When we looked at the pricing of Office 365 and did a cost/benefit analysis, we actually found that the Office 365 service for our environment would be less expensive than a physical server in our building,” Johns says. “And when we compared features, Office 365 also eliminated the other hosted services we were considering.”

### Solution

In addition to helping the City to control its email cost of ownership, using Office 365 has helped the city to more easily comply with document retention policies, as the system automatically backs up email content. Under the City’s legacy system, email content was stored as personal file folders (PST) files that were manually backed up on DVDs every month.

“One of the reasons that we were looking for a different solution was to meet records retention requirements from state and local authorities,” notes Johns. “We retain the majority of our records for a year. Some messages are kept for up to 10 years. Others require permanent retention. We have a really diverse amount of retention requirements that we have to comply with.”

By allowing the City to set automatic retention policies, Office 365 not only eliminates the need for manual back-ups, it also enhances the auditability of its email content. “Even if an email were altered, the original email would be kept in its original state. We can see every change that is made to email from the beginning until the end,” says Johns.

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Additionally, the integration of email with other applications that comprise Office 365 has given City employees new tools for collaboration and teamwork, Johns points out. "We do like to have the integration of Microsoft Office. Most of our in-office users are using Office 2007. We now have five on Office 2010, and we're about to set up an additional 16 on Office 2010. We weren't necessarily looking for the collaboration as a requirement, but when we started the Beta phase, it became a nice thing to have. People are taking advantage of the calendar sharing, the workplace collaboration, and the ability to work in teams"

With Office 365 mobile applications, City employees can now access email and other features from their mobile devices, which they couldn't do before. This has added a level of functionality that has been well received by the City's workforce.

"A lot of them really like having the calendar features actively linked to their mobile devices. When users accept a calendar invite on their phone, it's automatically added to their Outlook and put on the Exchange Online. That seems to be one of the new features that users are most talking about."

### **Benefits**

Perhaps the top benefit of replacing legacy email system with a state-of-the-art hosted solution has been the greater connectivity and productivity that are supported by new capabilities. "As far as productivity goes, I myself am out of the office quite a bit. I have three separate buildings that I deal with. But I am able to stay in touch with email and calendar and all that. I get it no matter where I am now," Johns reports. "And that extends beyond me to our Public Works Director, for example, who is also out of the office managing projects. He's now accessible wherever he is as well. I would say that productivity has definitely increased."

Migrating to Office 365 has also streamlined the maintenance burden for the City's IT department.

"We're no longer doing any labor intensive DVD backups. We're just using automatic archives. That frees me up from having to sit at my computer and do the backups manually," he says.

Responding to legal document requests from the proper authorities has also been streamlined. "For e-Discovery, we no longer need to handle the process from the user's computer. We can do it directly from the console. Before, if we had a request for public records, I would've had to deal with tracking down the information by myself manually. Now we can have our City Clerk do it, as it's easier to do it online instead of going through DVDs from months ago."

Using Office 365 also offers a higher level of security for email content than was provided by its legacy system.

"Our City Clerk was concerned at first that there would be some way for a third-party to access our email, but that concern has been pretty much dispelled," he explains.

"Our police officers' emails are not archived as most are not subject to public records requests, due to officer safety, and those that do fall subject are retained through the administration. But as far as the rest of the City employees, there's really not a concern that somebody unauthorized will be able to access their email, even though it is public record. Everything other than law enforcement is subject to public records requests."

*Office 365 also makes it easier for the City to comply with federal standards that are required in order to gain access to federal law enforcement networks*

With a higher level of security built in, Office 365 also makes it easier for the City to comply with federal standards that are required in order to gain access to federal law enforcement networks such as the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) and the Law Enforcement Information Exchange (LINX).

“Those networks are licensed through the FBI, so our access is dependent upon the level of security of our network,” Johns explains. “If we used our own hardware for email, complying with those security policies would create an additional cost for us. With Office 365, we don’t have any hardware in our network, so there’s nothing additional for us to comply with.”

The transition, says Johns, was straight forward. He credits early groundwork efforts to make the user community aware of the changes that were about to take place. He stresses the importance of user training in facilitating the City’s transition to Office 365.

“Most of the issues that people had initially were just the usual problems that people have with change, and somebody not knowing how to do something. It was a user training issue,” he says. “We did most of the training one-on-one. We also had some small groups, and we’re still having some group training sessions once a month. For our OWA [Outlook Web Access] users, I think the features are so much like Outlook, that it’s intuitive and easy to teach.”

“Within two days we had everything resolved and everyone was up and running,” says Johns.

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