



National Financial Partners

Microsoft Technology Improves Enterprise-Wide Collaboration for Financial Services Distributor

Business Needs

Many NFP firms were operating with different versions of Microsoft Outlook. Others relied on Yahoo!, Google or AOL as their e-mail system, while still others used GroupWise or GoldMine. Maintaining and archiving e-mail — a compliance requirement — was a costly administrative burden for these units. Moreover, because their systems operated independently of each other, they had no way to coordinate calendars electronically, hurting their ability to cross-sell with their fellow advisors.

E-mail is a mission-critical function for a corporation with scores of owned firms that depend on the support of the parent company and communication with each other for their growth and success. That support becomes difficult to deliver, however, if every firm is managing its own independent e-mail system.

NFP was determined to reduce the cost of doing business for its firms by lowering overall administrative costs, and centralizing e-mail for the entire enterprise was one very effective way to move toward that goal.

Solution

NFP launched an Enterprise E-mail Initiative in 2006, a program that would centralize the administration of e-mail for its firms in one location. The company implemented Microsoft Exchange Servers in its home office and adopted Microsoft Outlook 2007, laying the foundation for providing complete Outlook functionality to financial advisors at all its location.

The outlying offices were able to reach the centralized servers through remote procedure call (RPC) employing an encrypted system using Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) technology via the Internet. This system protected the servers and company data from outside intrusion while offering access to all subsidiary professional staff.

NFP worked with Microsoft to develop an implementation toolkit that could be re-used for each firm added to the system and that was flexible enough to meet the specific needs of each subsidiary. Then NFP called on the talents of Microsoft Gold Certified Partner All Covered, headquartered in Redwood City, Calif., to help roll out the new e-mail capability at NFP's firms across the country. All Covered made sure at each subsidiary location that the most current versions of Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Exchange

were installed correctly, that the e-mail clients were configured properly and that previous e-mail messages were moved onto the new system without problems.

NFP also coordinated closely with Fortiva, which provided improved e-mail searching and enhanced archiving by moving attachments to different servers and linking them to the original messages to lessen the demand on NFP's own servers. NFP also provided its firms with enhanced tools like Postini to filter out spam, as well as BlackBerry and Treo mobile devices to enable access to e-mail from virtually anywhere.

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Benefits

By centralizing the e-mail system for all its units, NFP achieved a number of goals.

- **Improved compliance.** The parent corporation now is able to directly access the e-mails of its firms for audits to ensure compliance with corporate policies. "Our ability to have all our firms on one centralized system allowed for increased compliance with e-mail retention policies," said Stuart Tainsky, NFP's senior vice president of technology.
- **Lower costs.** "We also lowered administration costs at our firms because the corporation handled management and administration of messages and e-mail backups from a single set of servers, freeing all the other sites from this burden," Tainsky noted.
- **Mobility.** Advisors now have e-mail communication at their fingertips through the Microsoft Exchange servers and their personal handheld devices.
- **Scheduling coordination.** Coordinating calendars is simple, and now an advisor can schedule a colleague with a different specialty to join a meeting with a client or prospect.
- **Robust, scalable e-mail for new subsidiaries.** New firms that are acquired by NFP now can keep their entrepreneurial feel while enjoying the level of communications previously available only at larger companies. They can focus on growing their businesses knowing that their e-mail capability will expand with them, thanks to the parent company's centralized system that allows for rapid growth. The corporate office takes advantage of the system's scalability and provides administration.
- **No downtime during moves.** NFP firms no longer worry about the impact on communications of moving or opening additional offices. Because all its e-mail is handled through the centralized site, a new office's messages can be received and transmitted even before its doors are open. When a firm moves, it experiences none of the e-mail downtime it might otherwise expect while it reinstalls its e-mail servers.

The servers remain up and running at headquarters, and advisors can access their e-mail through the Internet from home or other offices.

Today, NFP's firms maintain an even higher level of confidence that NFP is serving them and helping them communicate with their clients. "They have gained an increased confidence knowing that our IT department has a vested interest in the success of their business and is supporting them," Tainsky said, "and our having a good relationship with Microsoft allows us to provide an extra level of service."