



The
University
of Sydney

Overview

Country or Region: Australia

Industry: Education

Customer Profile

One of Australia's largest universities, the University of Sydney offers hundreds of degree programs to 45,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students. It employs 10,000 staff and faculty.

Business Situation

The University of Sydney wanted to give its faculty and staff effective tools for collaborating with colleagues in various locations around the world.

Solution

With Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007, employees have instant messaging and Web conferencing capabilities that make it possible for them to work on collaborative projects worldwide.

Benefits

- Faster communications
- Improved collaboration
- Federation capabilities
- Increased effectiveness and productivity
- Simplified IT environment

Major Research University Increases Productivity with Unified Communications

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Mark Finkelde, Technical Team Lead, University Exchange Migration Project, University of Sydney

Founded in 1850, the University of Sydney is a leading research institute that operates in multiple campus locations worldwide. Over the years, the university's many departments had adopted a diverse range of incompatible technology solutions—including various e-mail systems. To provide a common messaging solution enterprisewide, the IT department deployed Microsoft® Exchange Server 2003 in January 2006. In December of 2006, the university took the next step toward unified communications when it launched a pilot program with Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007. By using built-in instant messaging and presence capabilities, employees now have real-time access to their colleagues' availability. With instant messaging and sophisticated Web conferencing capabilities, users also have a variety of ways to contact colleagues quickly and work collaboratively on local or global projects.



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Situation

Known for excellence in research, the University of Sydney is Australia's oldest and one of its largest universities. The school has 17 separate departments and offers hundreds of degree programs to 45,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students. Although the university operates seven campuses in and around the Sydney area, its influence reaches far beyond the borders of Australia. The school is an active member of several international educational and research organizations throughout Europe, Asia, and the United States and is affiliated with many universities worldwide.

Communication was a major issue for the university's 10,000 employees (about one-third faculty and two-thirds staff), who are spread across multiple locations in different countries. Staff and faculty members needed an efficient way to contact and share information with each other and with colleagues at other universities, but there was no easy way to do that.

Historically, each department at the university has operated somewhat autonomously. Over the years, multiple e-mail systems were implemented throughout the university. But without compatibility between these systems and no centralized user database, direct e-mail communication was sometimes impossible or, at best, slow and inefficient. Departments also relied on a variety of software products for real-time communications, with varying degrees of success. “The challenge we faced was that there was no standard or management framework wrapped around those products,” says Mark Finkelde, Technical Team Lead of the University Exchange Migration Project at the University of Sydney. In addition, many employees needed to exchange very large data files with colleagues. Often sent as e-mail attachments, these large files put an extra strain on e-mail systems.

To begin to unify the departments and reduce the cost and complexity of the infrastructure, the university's IT department deployed Microsoft® Exchange Server 2003 and the Windows Server® 2003 operating system, including the Active Directory® service, in January 2006. Bringing all employees together under a single Active Directory structure greatly simplified the messaging environment, but the university still had a need for better collaboration tools. “We wanted a solution that was fairly easy to deploy and something that would plug into the existing Exchange Server infrastructure that we were building,” says Finkelde.

Solution

In mid-2006, the IT department considered several unified communications solutions. “The primary driver for unified communications at the university is to help our faculty and staff to be more efficient and reduce human latency when collaborating with other individuals,” says Finkelde. Individual departments within the university had experimented with various solutions, including Blackboard, Adobe Connect, Skype, and Polycom Web conferencing products, but no single solution was used enterprisewide.

The IT group worked together with Microsoft Gold Certified Partner HP to deploy Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 as part of a pilot program in December 2006. Fully integrated with the Microsoft Office Outlook® 2003 messaging and collaboration client and Exchange Server 2003, Office Communications Server 2007 streamlines communications through instant messaging (IM), presence awareness, and audio, video, and Web conferencing. Microsoft Office Communicator 2007, the client software that runs on each workstation, makes these features easily accessible to every user. To help users experience synchronized audio and video in a conference firsthand,

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Microsoft and partner HP provided the university with the Microsoft RoundTable™ conferencing and collaboration device. No larger than an average office speaker phone and comparably priced, RoundTable provides a 360-degree panoramic video of participants in a conference room. It tracks the flow of the conversation, spotlights the image and voice of the person speaking, and displays images of other participants in side-by-side window panes on the participants' computer screens.

HP Services designed and deployed the university's Office Communications Server 2007 infrastructure to more than 100 users in the pilot program. The success of the program, which is still ongoing, has prompted the university to consider offering the solution to all 10,000 employees.

Benefits

With Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007, the University of Sydney has seen how the right collaboration tools can make its employees more effective and productive. This could give the university a competitive advantage in obtaining grant funding and attracting top-notch students.

Faster Communications

Before the university deployed Office Communications Server 2007, employees usually got in touch with each other by e-mail or telephone. If a colleague was out of the office, it could take days to get an answer to a question. With the presence capabilities in Office Communicator 2007, employees can set the status of their availability (e.g., to Online, Busy, Away, or Do Not Disturb) and share that information with other contacts. “By using presence information, we are able to see who is available and willing to talk at the time we require rather than defaulting to the ‘catch-all’ communication of e-mail,” says Finkelde. People who are online at the same time can use IM capabilities to open a chat session and get simple questions answered

quickly. For the university, presence information, IM, and voice over IP (VoIP) capabilities have reduced unnecessary e-mail traffic and storage of messages and cut down on missed calls among colleagues.

Improved Collaboration

One of the university's primary goals with Office Communications Server 2007 was to provide an easy means for colleagues to work collaboratively—inside and outside of the university. Previously, it was difficult for employees to share ideas and exchange information across departments or work together as global teams. “Office Communications Server 2007 will help our staff to better connect with teams and collaborate more efficiently,” says Finkelde.

It is easy to arrange meetings because Office Communications Server 2007 is tightly integrated with Outlook 2003. Although the details of a colleague's appointments are kept confidential, employees can view a colleague's calendar from within any Microsoft Office application. They can easily see when a colleague is out of town, has meetings scheduled, or is available to meet. When the meeting host, for example, a faculty member, sends a meeting invitation, the first available time that is convenient for all invitees is suggested. The time is automatically entered into the host's Office Outlook 2007 calendar and appears as a tentative meeting on the invitees' calendars. These features make it far easier for employees to arrange meetings or conferences, especially when invitees work in distant locations.

The university is particularly impressed with the audio, video, and Web conferencing capabilities that RoundTable offers compared to traditional teleconferencing. “After using the RoundTable device for a few meetings, we could really see the power of Microsoft unified communications,” says Finkelde.

“With RoundTable, people in many locations can attend meetings together virtually. Now we will use RoundTable and conferencing features in Office Communications Server 2007 to allow for more engaging meetings with video and data capabilities.”

“The tight integration of Office Communicator 2007 with the university’s messaging platform is one of the key benefits, and HP is now working with the university to deploy Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007 to complete the communications and collaboration platform,” says Anthony Vitnell, Unified Communications Architect at HP.

Federation Capabilities

Federation is a capability that the university looks forward to implementing. With federation, authorized users at affiliated universities can communicate with colleagues at the University of Sydney in real time in an encrypted, authenticated environment. “As our partner universities deploy Office Communications Server 2007, we will look to federate with them so that our research and academic staff can easily share information,” says Finkelde. “Many universities we are affiliated with will benefit from this instant access to their peers and through the sharing of valuable information.”

Increased Effectiveness and Productivity

Together, the many facets of a unified communications solution help people at the University of Sydney work more efficiently. Faster communication, improved collaboration, and federation capabilities all contribute to an increase in employee productivity. These features are all the more important because the university is so large, and its campuses and affiliates are spread throughout the globe. “The real-time features of Office Communications Server 2007 give us instant access to people and information, which will significantly increase our

effectiveness and productivity,” says Finkelde.

The university staff expects that Web conferencing will result in real productivity gains, for users and the IT staff. “I think the video conferencing at the desktop is superb,” says Finkelde. “I see a future where everyone talks to each other across the network with video conferencing. I was really blown away by how smooth it is and how easy it is to add or remove people.”

“We look forward to the external federation and anywhere access capabilities, which will provide significant efficient gains for our employees,” says Geoffrey Brown, Director of Distributed ICT at the University of Sydney. “By providing our staff with these enhanced communications tools, we will be able to rapidly respond to our students and customers demands and present ourselves more effectively to the outside world.”

Simplified IT Environment

The university took its first step toward unifying departments and campuses when it adopted Exchange Server 2003 and Active Directory for its messaging platform. As a result of that strategic decision, the IT group has been able to consolidate many heterogeneous systems and begin to migrate all 10,000 employees to a centralized messaging solution. “The goal was to unify messaging and use Exchange Server 2003 to take advantage of other collaboration technologies and solutions such as Office Communications Server 2007,” says Finkelde. The university is already working with HP to design and deploy Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 to this unified communications foundation and further enrich the user experience.

For More Information

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