

Email Replacement Analysis

Introduction

Electronic mail is one of the most used software applications in the world. Since its widespread adoption in the 1990s, it has become an indispensable tool for communication. As the technology of electronic mail has matured and simultaneously become ubiquitous, new models for delivering the service have evolved. E-mail is becoming a utility.

As e-mail has become a utility, the business and technology models that evolved with it in the 90s have changed in fundamental ways. Those changes are significant enough to warrant a re-examination by the University of how it provides and supports email.

A brief description of changes in the environment that affect electronic mail are listed below:

- Rapid Technological Change. New Web2.0 applications like GoogleApps and MicrosoftLive combine email, texting, voice, blogs, wikis, document sharing, search and many other features together to provide distinctive advantages to performing collaborative work. These tools are often far better than those that we could deploy on our own. The maturity of the Internet as a technology platform has also made it practical to deliver software as a service rather than as a self hosted and self maintained application.
- Business Model Change. Competition in the marketplace has made these systems available at low or no cost. Initiatives by Google and Microsoft provide advertising-free services available at no cost to the Education community. At the same time, the cost for internally managed email systems continues to rise due to the need to provide storage, SPAM filtering, virus filtering, etc. Economies of scale give the large players substantial advantage in delivering low cost mail solutions.
- Regulatory Changes. Recent changes in North Carolina law have increased the retention period for email to 10 years. The financial implications of these unfunded mandates have only been dimly understood. We are currently unable to meet this mandate with the resources we have. As the need to retain information has increased, the costs for answering "e-discovery" or FOIA requests has also increased substantially.
- Peer Activities. Nearly half of the Schools in the UNC System have implemented hosted email solutions (Microsoft and Google) and most others are looking at it. UNC Greensboro has recently elected to convert all of their faculty/staff and student accounts to Gmail. NCSU is close behind. Consequently, there is substantial interest at General Administration in encouraging campuses to look towards reducing cost through hosted email solutions.

All of these factors combine to make a thoughtful analysis of the current strategy imperative.

Proposal:

Given the campus wide nature of this application it is proposed that a broad-based committee be established to answer the following key questions regarding email:

Is the current email system adequate for UNC Charlotte over the next five years? Can it cost effectively deliver the services needed by faculty, staff and students?

If not, what should be the replacement strategy?

As a campus-wide resource that has major impact on all facets of our community the committee should have input from the different constituencies on campus. The following committee composition is proposed for discussion.

- Representatives from the FITSAC (2)
- Representative from Student Government (1)
- Representative from Graduate Students (1)
- Staff Representatives (2)
- Alumni Affairs representative (1)
- Business Affairs representative (1)
- Chancellor at-large appointment (2)
- Information and Technology Services (2)
- Vice Chancellor for ITS (ex-officio)

The purpose of the committee would be to address the above questions.

In order to implement a pilot project with a new mail system, or to make the necessary changes to the existing system, the committee would need to produce an actionable recommendation by April, 2010. This would give sufficient time to acquire the resources and create a project for implementation during summer of 2010.