Guy Collins and Ken Sayers

When the Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 at East Hartford Public Schools crashed in 2009, more than 1,400 administrators, teachers and support staff were left without vital email communications for two days.

The school district wanted a permanent fix but was under pressure to cut costs amid a freeze on capital funding. After an extensive search, school officials turned to Digital BackOffice for a hosted Exchange email service.

In addition to its Exchange 2003 server, the IT department also was supporting a Blackberry Enterprise server for mobile device access, and a rapidly growing email database with both Outlook and Outlook Web Access (OWA) users, all handled in-house. School officials considered several upgrade options, including the creation of a cluster exchange boasting three servers.

"Our goals for the new Exchange environment were to support better communication, improve reliability, and streamline access to email for increasingly mobile users and out-of-district access," said Collins, who also wanted to simplify IT management and reduce the amount of time IT staff spent on system maintenance and oversight.

After looking at a number of options and soliciting bids from several hosted Exchange companies, the school district hired Digital BackOffice to upgrade to Microsoft Exchange 2010, integrate with Blackberry's newest interface, and provide full hosting services going forward.

> "**School administrators didn't ever want to have email down again, even for a day** – everyone communicates by email," said Guy Collins, supervisor of information systems for East Hartford schools. "**Because of our constrained capital budget, we looked beyond an in-district Exchange server upgrade and found that Digital BackOffice provided us a migration solution to Exchange 2010 at a lower cost.**"

Business Needs

East Hartford Public Schools serves more than 7,470 students in grades K-12 at three secondary schools, 11 elementary schools, two alternative education facilities, three magnet schools and two parochial schools. The Information Technology Department provides districtwide programming and technical support for:

STUDENT MANAGEMENT: Student scheduling, grade reporting, attendance, discipline, progress reporting, test scores, maintenance of student database/server, staff training, all special requested reports

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT: Payroll, personnel, financial, student transportation, support/technical help provided to Information Technology Coordinators for K-12

COMMUNICATION SERVICES: Voice/data, email, service/repair of laptops/PCs/printers, maintain/upgrade of software and licensing, staff training, and desktop support

The Information Technology Department has one network administrator who oversees a complex network of 65 servers and 120 switches and routers in 17 buildings, along with the telecommunications system for the entire school system. A primary goal of the server upgrade was to cut down on the hours the administrator spends on routine maintenance and operations.

Solution

Digital BackOffice offered East Hartford Public Schools a hosted Microsoft Exchange E-Mail server, managed 24 hours a day by experienced technicians at the Digital BackOffice data center in Connecticut. All software is covered by the Service Provider License Agreement (SPLA) between Microsoft and Digital BackOffice, assuring East Hartford Public Schools of licensing compliance.

"Software, server computer hardware, connectivity and support are included with the service priced per user per month," said Dale Bruckhart, vice president of marketing for Digital BackOffice, **"and hosted email services qualify for a discount from the Universal Service Fund, commonly referred to as E-Rate."**

East Hartford Public Schools will save $15,000 to $20,000 in the next three years as a result of working with Digital BackOffice to obtain federal funds, said Collins. The U.S. Department of Education's E-Rate program offsets the cost of certain services, including email hosting.

Digital BackOffice started the migration from Exchange 2003 in early March 2010, and worked closely with the East Hartford Public Schools IT staff to:

> Move user mail accounts over a weekend
> Minimize downtime
> Allow adequate time for client testing and IP address propagation across the public Internet

"DBO Chief Technical Engineer Francis Palacio worked with us around the clock over several weeks to troubleshoot every client update, IP address change, spam list update, and Blackberry software patch needed to integrate successfully with Exchange 2010," said East Hartford Network Administrator Ken Sayers. Because many users access email from home computers or mobile devices like Blackberry, the profusion of browser types, device configurations and settings can overwhelm any IT support staff during a major migration, resulting in sometimes disastrous communication disruptions.

Digital BackOffice has been providing hosted Exchange services for seven years and has taken customers through three versions of Microsoft Exchange in that time. "As a Microsoft vendor, we have done 30 or 40 of these email migrations," said Bruckhart. "The East Hartford Public Schools migration was challenging due to the size of the IT system, and it would have been a real challenge for someone with less experience."

As of April 2010, East Hartford Public Schools' 1,400 email users are connecting to Exchange 2010 on a powerful Hewlett Packard server, supported by an experienced Digital BackOffice technical team operating as an adjunct to the East Hartford Public Schools Business Services department.

Digital BackOffice worked closely with the school system's IT staff to make the transition as smooth as possible, Collins said. "It was a big challenge, as migrating to newer technologies is always tricky," he said. **"Digital BackOffice did a great job of working with us to solve all of the problems, and we are very satisfied with the outcome."**

Benefits

East Hartford Public Schools now enjoys support for the latest features available in Microsoft Outlook, Internet Explorer and non-Microsoft network browsers and mobile devices, while conserving IT and financial resources.

IMPROVED AVAILABILITY

Digital BackOffice hosted Exchange resides at an in-state data center equipped with a highly available infrastructure including on-site power generation, multiple Internet gateways, secure access, redundant server components, and customized cooling. Hosted Exchange is offered with a 99.99% service level guarantee. **"Digital BackOffice allows us to maintain control over the server,"** said Collins. **"Their server is part of our domain, and we have a VPN connection to their site. We control the spam filter and we can add users, change mailboxes and change security settings."**

INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

Hosted Exchange reduced the burden on the East Hartford IT staff in two ways. Daily maintenance, software updates, back-ups, and hardware maintenance are the responsibility of Digital BackOffice. Planning, procurement and migration to Exchange 2010 were also greatly simplified by contracting for a hosted service inclusive of all components normally purchased separately. **"It has freed up my staff not to have to spend several hours a week working on Exchange issues," said Collins.**

HEIGHTENED SECURITY

Hosted Exchange has reduced the burden of worrying about security among the IT staff as well, since Digital BackOffice's highly trained technicians are maintaining the system 24 hours a day. **"We no longer have to worry about keeping the system viable, since Digital BackOffice has taken over that task for us,"** said Collins.

EASE OF USE

Upgrading to Microsoft Exchange 2010 has given school administrators and staff members access to a streamlined email service that is easier to use. **"With Exchange 2010 it's much easier to manipulate emails, and the learning curve is drastically shortened,"** said Collins.

THE ROAD AHEAD

When the time comes to upgrade to the next generation of Microsoft Exchange servers, Digital BackOffice will handle the transition smoothly and automatically, saving the school system the time and expense involved in deciding how to move forward.

Summary

Several months after Digital BackOffice began providing hosted Exchange services to East Hartford Public Schools, email and related IT operations have been running more smoothly than ever. School officials are very pleased with the migration and with the ongoing relationship they have developed with Digital BackOffice.

"In fact, our partnership with Digital BackOffice has provided real peace of mind, because we're putting the responsibility in someone else's hands" said Collins.

ABOUT DIGITAL BACK OFFICE

Why work with Digital Back Office? We know networks. We know wireless. We know security. But most of all, we know the performance, reliability and customer service you are looking for.

Better than anyone else, we can build you cost-effective connectivity and hosting solutions because our focus is on keeping you connected.

YOUR CONNECTIVITY IS IMPORTANT—THAT'S WHY WE GUARANTEE:

> The right solution for your needs
> Unwavering customer support
> Open lines of communication 24/7
> Strong partnerships with major technology corporations
> Exceeding our customer's expectations

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