Brady bridges communication and collaboration gap with Google Apps

International manufacturer identifies major opportunity to connect employees around the globe

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At a Glance

What Brady wanted to do:
• Eliminate unpredictable email system build-out costs associated with onboarding new users.

What they did:
• Selected Google Apps for Business for its no-hassle, cloud-based model for email, real-time messaging, and document sharing.

What they achieved:
• Established a reliable, scalable, and feature-rich communications and collaboration portal that has resulted in improved interaction among global employees and eased the burden on IT.

Organization

Brady Corp. is a $1.2 billion international manufacturer and marketer of complete solutions that identify and protect premises. Brady creates a variety of products from biohazard markers to high-voltage warning signs to laboratory materials labeling. The company also specializes in personnel identification. Founded in 1914 in Eau Claire, Wisc., W.H. Brady Co. eventually became Brady Corp. in 1998 and is now based in Milwaukee. The company trades on the NYSE under the symbol BRC.

Challenge

In 2009, Brady Corp. had an aggressive plan for growth that IT wanted to be ready to support. Over the course of eight years, Brady had acquired 30 companies, expanding its workforce to more than 6,000 employees in 40 countries around the world.

"We were on a journey to grow dramatically and we didn't want to slow that down because of our infrastructure," remarked Bentley Curran, CIO and vice president of IT at Brady.

What hindered the company's agility were its on-premise messaging systems – IBM Lotus Domino and Notes and Microsoft Exchange. Each time the company added users from acquisitions, it had trouble scaling hardware, software, and licenses. "We had to scale in chunks of capacity, so there was no predictability in cost. It might be the 1,000th user that bumped us over our limit and forced an expensive build-out of the data center," Curran noted.

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—Bentley Curran, CIO and vice president

In addition, the companies that were being acquired tended to have Exchange and would need to be migrated to Lotus. "It was an incredibly painful process," he lamented.

IT spent so much time trying to deliver capability that it couldn't focus on the bigger issue of collaboration. "We were stuck working on nonbusiness-value activities when we wanted to look at more important projects, such as how to help R&D communicate more effectively or improve document movement between sites," Curran pointed out.

"We were struggling to provide basic information-sharing capabilities to our entire global team," noted Matt Vandenbush, Director of IT Strategy & Architecture. "We limited deployment of simple things like chat and document collaboration because the licensing was too expensive. In addition, performance in Europe and Asia was poor. Our business users were frustrated with the experience."

To solve these issues, Vandenbush focused the search for a new collaboration suite on on-demand offerings. "We found that we could extend collaboration services to our entire workforce, located anywhere in the world, and from any device at a lower overall cost. With Google Apps, new users could be added at less than ¼ the cost of our old model," Vandenbush said.

Solution

Brady Corp. deployed Google Apps for Business as its new communications and collaboration platform in March 2010, after considering cloud-based services from IBM and Microsoft.

Luke Leonhard, Web Services manager at Brady, reflected on the extensive platform research: "Google had a maturity beyond email and was years ahead in all aspects."

To start, the company piloted Gmail among 200 employees. Once it was clear that those users were onboard and ready to champion the switchover, IT did a big-bang rollout across the company's 90 worldwide locations.

Brady enlisted nearby Milwaukee School of Engineering independent study students to develop profiles for various roles within the organization. They used those profiles to create targeted video tutorials for employees about how Google Apps, including Gmail, calendaring, chat, Google Docs, and Google Sites, could help them in their everyday work. IT also ensured at rollout time that it had helpers from the college and Google at each site to train users.

Curran feels the up-front work was incredibly worthwhile. "When I asked a majority of people if they feel the tool is well utilized, the answer was well above what we expected," he stated.

Benefits

Curran believes that Brady achieved its goals of cost predictability, fast scaling, and a reduced IT burden with Google Apps.

As Brady acquires more companies, it can tally exact costs in advance to add users to the Google Apps platform. The company no longer has to worry that one additional user will cause unforeseen build-out expenses.

Leonhard is also excited that usage of business-critical tools is no longer restricted by licensing. "Our jobs went from constraining and limiting people's usage to making sure everyone uses these tools as effectively as possible," he attested.

Google Apps also lightens the load on IT, which is centrally managed but geographically dispersed. With little more than 150 IT staff to support thousands of users around the world, Brady enjoys Google Apps' cloud-based strategy. Curran noted that rather than IT trying to keep the messaging lights on, it can brainstorm with business leaders about how to improve communication and collaboration. Also, users can start projects independent of IT.

For instance, the finance team used Google Sites to get up and running quickly with a transformation initiative. Rather than having to email documents around for feedback, team members used Google Sites as a central repository for all project materials and to communicate with one another.

About Google Apps for Business

Google Apps for Business offers simple, powerful communication and collaboration tools for enterprises of any size—all hosted by Google—to streamline setup, minimize maintenance, and reduce IT costs. With Gmail, Google Calendar, and integrated IM, users can stay connected and work together with ease, even in private domains. And, using Google Docs, which includes word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation tools, they can share files and collaborate in real time, keeping versions organized and available wherever and whenever users work. Google Sites, Google Groups, and Google Video add further capabilities for Web publishing, secure sharing, and video storage and access.

For more information visit:
www.google.com/a

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—Luke Leonhard, Web Services manager

The marketing team also has improved its processes with Google Docs and Google Sites. Department heads can post a project spreadsheet and request that everyone simultaneously fill in their own data. Leaders can easily see their progress, rather than having to remind people to send back their attachments and manually inputting the aggregated information. "Our overall time to business value has been dramatically improved thanks to Google Apps. The platform has saved workers hours a week if not more, and only one person touches certain information, guaranteeing better accuracy," Leonhard commented.

These tools become more critical as Brady grows, according to Curran, because in the past, one person would have legacy information in his or her head and now that information can be shared with the entire company. As companies come onboard, executives can easily connect them with their peers and bring them up to speed on corporate knowledge via Google Apps.

Also, IT keeps close tabs on user preferences and tutorial search queries to ensure quick and up-to-date answers for them.

Curran credits Google Apps' anywhere, anytime capabilities, including via most mobile device platforms, for increasing productivity and knowledge sharing.

"Google Apps has brought teams together across language barriers and time zones and has fostered inclusiveness," Curran observed. "It's also helped IT get beyond routine maintenance to understanding the business's needs at a personal level."