

A Rare Win-Win: Counties Save Money While Improving Technology

Google Apps gives employees better collaboration tools while reducing IT costs and headaches.

Faced with difficult budget circumstances and a growing demand for services, Multnomah County, the most populous county in Oregon, is striving to be ever more innovative and efficient. When it came time to replace its aging e-mail system, the county chose Google Apps for Government to increase employee collaboration and productivity, while saving taxpayers approximately \$100,000 annually in licensing costs and up to \$500,000 in staff time and staff costs.

Multnomah County's sentiments are echoed by counties small and large across the country, including Larimer County in northern Colorado and Amador County in California's gold country. These county governments have found that Google Apps gives them more productivity for less money, top-notch security, simple deployment and improved accessibility.

Google Apps is a comprehensive package of productivity applications that includes e-mail, documents, calendaring and scheduling, instant messaging, video sharing and more. With this 100 percent Web-based solution — which requires nothing more to install than an Internet browser — government agencies can cut IT costs, streamline communications and add new innovative tools that help employees work together.

Lower Cost, Better Value

Google's Web-based solution costs less than \$5 per person, per month. The Google toolset enables savings on software licenses for program suites, especially since many employees don't need all the programs that come in traditional productivity packages to do their job. "In many cases, Google Apps provides us with equivalent capabilities for no additional cost," said Multnomah CIO Sherry Swackhamer.

The collaborative tools available in the suite have yielded many unexpected benefits for government users. Multnomah County employees are taking advantage of opportunities for real-time collaboration when revising documents. Now, up to 50 people can work on a document or spreadsheet simultaneously, in real time.

In Amador County, IT Director Jeff White said Google's collaborative tools empower employees by giving them a

simple way to set up their own file sharing for projects, rather than requesting that IT support staff set up that function for them. This reduces demand on IT support staff and saves that department the billable IT expense. Instant messaging, voice chat and video chat all help streamline communication between employees as well.

The Amador County IT team also has embraced Google Sites. Included as part of the Google Apps package, Sites is a tool that allows people to set up websites easily. The county replaced its old intranet site, saving money on hardware, energy consumption and licensing costs. White also got rid of Amador County's old meeting booking program and replaced it with Google's calendaring system. Users from all over the county now use this tool to reserve meeting space and equipment available for loan at no extra charge.

Users are increasing their productivity in other ways too. In Multnomah County, employees enjoy roughly 250 times the e-mail storage they had previously, since Google Apps offers 25 GB of mailbox storage per employee. This lets users focus on their core mission, rather than spend valuable time cleaning out their e-mail boxes.

'Big Bang' Migration Suits Larimer County

Larimer County, Colo., also wanted an e-mail and calendaring solution that would best position its organization for the future. "We did a detailed comparison of Google Apps and several on-premise solutions," CIO Andy Paratore said. Staff further assessed the solution with a six-week pilot project, in which 100 employees verified that all the functions they needed were available. "We found that Google delivered the best value and features," Paratore added.

In order to control their costs, Larimer opted for an aggressive migration schedule, done over the long July 4, 2010, weekend. Dubbed the "Big Bang" migration, the switch offered the



ANDY PARATORE, CIO,
Larimer County, Colo.

county several desired outcomes. It is now saving as much as \$75,000 annually in server and IT support costs, and the hosted solution allowed the county to decommission three servers.

FISMA Certificate Addresses Security

Security often tops the list of considerations among agencies who contemplate moving to a Web-based solution. "In IT, we feel a great responsibility to protect data," explained Amador County's White. With the launch of Google Apps for Government, he and his colleagues were reassured knowing that despite Google's international presence, data from government customers is housed in Google's stateside data centers.



SHERRY SWACKHAMER,
CIO, Multnomah County, Ore.

In addition, Google is the first suite of cloud-based e-mail and collaboration applications to receive a "moderate" Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) certification, validating that it has satisfied FISMA's rigorous requirements. Experts agree that Google Apps offers equivalent or superior security to on-premise solutions.

Multnomah County put Google's security credentials to the test. "We wanted to understand the FISMA certification and what that meant in terms of how our data would be stored, recovered and protected in transit," said Swackhamer in an interview with the Center for Digital Government. "We found that FISMA is comprehensive in its standards, guidance regarding security, and risk mitigation framework — more comprehensive than any one agency can be."

Larimer County names the disaster-recovery benefits as another key factor in its decision to go with Google Apps. Since the solution is externally hosted and backed up in Google's data centers, fears of data loss are laid to rest.

Redundant data centers store information in more than one place. If a problem arises, users are seamlessly redirected to an alternate data source with identical information, with no interruption in service. Uptime of 99.9 percent is guaranteed, with no scheduled downtime, resulting in first-rate reliability that more than 3 million customers depend upon. Multilevel support is also available around the clock.

Mobile Access a Key Benefit

Employees in all three counties are taking advantage of the ability to access data and collaborate with co-workers remotely. Included as a part of the per-user fee, Google's Web-based solution allows mobile access for employees with iPhones,

Google Apps: By the Numbers*

County	Amador County, Calif.	Larimer County, Colo.	Multnomah County, Ore.
Population	38,000	300,000	735,000
# of Employees	400	2,000	4,500
Migration Length	3 months including pilot period	3-day "Big Bang" migration	5-month phased migration
Cost Savings	More than \$20,000 annually vs. other solutions	\$50,000 - \$75,000 annually in server and support costs	\$100,000 annually in licensing costs; up to \$500,000 in staff time and staff costs
Favorite Features	Calendar function and streamlined meeting room booking process	Collaboration via Google Docs, voice and video chat, and mobile access	E-mail storage is 250 times that of prior solution

**All figures are approximate.*

Android devices, BlackBerrys, Windows Mobile devices and more. In short, they can connect to their data wherever they can get online.

"The mobile component was really advantageous," said Larimer County's Paratore. "Whether employees are in their squad car, office or home, they can get the same look, feel and features."

Paratore pointed out that Google Apps provides additional cost savings by extending the life of desktop PCs, since a user's desktop hardware is less relevant when accessing applications online.



JEFF WHITE, IT Director,
Amador County, Calif.

User-Friendly Training Tools

An added advantage to Google's Web-based platform is the fact that Google continuously provides updates and new functionality, introduced with minimal impact to the organization. Paratore also noted that extensive online training and help tools make users more self-sufficient, and less dependent on IT, when questions arise.

Amador County's White also found the training resources a great asset in that county's deployment. "We embraced all the training material we got from Google, and that contributed greatly to the success of this rollout in Amador County," he said.



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