

Delta Hotels and Resorts checks in to Google Apps to improve collaboration and ease burden on IT



At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Find a low-cost, low-maintenance messaging and collaboration system that would also spark collaboration among employees at the chain's 46 properties.

What they did

- Selected Google Apps for Business for its no-hassle, cloud-based model for email and document sharing and range of collaborative features.

What they accomplished

- Established a scalable, inexpensive communication and collaboration hub for the Canadian chain's thousands of employees.

Organization

Delta Hotels and Resorts is a Toronto-based hospitality chain spanning Canada from coast to coast. From its humble beginnings in 1962 as a 62-room motor inn, the company has evolved into the nation's leading first-class hotel and resort company, managing a family of 46 properties. Known both for its customer service and customer loyalty, Delta Hotels and Resorts is the gold standard for Canada's hospitality industry.

Challenge

In 2007, Delta Hotels and Resorts was sold by its parent company and was in need of new communication and collaboration tools. In 2009, incoming Director of Digital Innovation Michael Rodger sought a lower cost-per-user technology – a necessity to achieve his goal of providing access to messaging and collaboration tools to 90% of the company's 7,500 employees.

"We believe in inclusiveness and that a strong brand needs a strong employee community. Our email, document sharing and collaboration systems have to support that," Rodger explains.

At the same time he planned to build out the user base, Rodger wanted a self-service offering that would resolve the need for IT to provision employees with email and other resources. To avoid adding headcount to the tech team, the new system also had to be low maintenance.

In addition, Rodger sought a new solution that would help streamline some of the company's more cumbersome processes. For instance, the finance team, executives and department heads would email each other Microsoft Excel budgeting spreadsheets. Inevitably, they faced versioning issues as well as delays when people didn't receive emailed spreadsheets.

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 —Michael Rodger, Director of Digital Innovation

Likewise, the brand standards binders for each hotel required frequent – and often costly – updating. These binders, which contain information such as how to make the beds and how many times to spray a mirror before wiping it dry, are critical road-maps for hotel services and standards. Each quarter, several binders were updated, printed and shipped to the hotels. "This was an expensive, wasteful procedure," Rodger notes.

Mobility was another critical factor in choosing a new system. In the past, employees were limited to using BlackBerry devices because it was too difficult to support email clients and network access for multiple platforms.

Rodger looked for a solution that would remove these limitations and allow him to offer more employees mobile access to critical resources.

Finally, Rodger wanted a system that would let employees get to know one another and form communities outside of their own hotels. "We wanted a more collaborative technology that would give corporate-wide visibility to pockets of expertise and encourage sharing of ideas and best practices," Rodger says.

Solution

Delta Hotels and Resorts chose Google Apps in 2009 after comparing it to Microsoft Office's hosted service and in-house deployment options. "Google Apps capabilities and price blew Microsoft away," Rodger notes. "Google Apps is 20% of the cost-per-user of the Microsoft offerings we evaluated. At such a low price point, I can get to our goal of 90% of users online at no additional cost to the brand."

Although Rodger initially only created 2,400 accounts, that number has since swelled to 6,300. During employee orientations, users are signed up for Google's mail, contacts, calendar, chat and video chat as well as for Google Docs and Google Sites.

"Google Apps is now a Day One checklist item, right up there with uniforms and badges," Rodger says, noting that this strategy ensures maximum participation by employees.

Benefits

Delta Hotels and Resorts' implementation of Google Apps has received a very positive response from its associates, according to Rodger. Although employees are only formally trained on email, calendar and contacts, they are finding innovative uses for many aspects of Google Apps.

"I'd estimate that Google Apps has increased front-of-house user productivity by 10%" Rodger says. For example, employees involved in the budgeting process now use Google Docs to share spreadsheets instead of emailing around Excel spreadsheets. This provides version control and offers a clear view of document updates and changes. "We've shaved eight weeks off of the end-to-end budgeting process which translates into close to 30% time savings," Rodger notes.

The content management and distribution of the hotel standards binder has also dramatically improved. All the information is now posted on Google Sites, where it can be updated in real-time, so that binders no longer require printing and shipping when changes are made. "This expensive, paper-centric process is gone!" Rodger says. In addition, the standards are indexed so users can easily search for the data they need versus having to comb through thick notebooks.

Google Sites has helped Delta Hotels and Resorts realize its vision of cross-property cooperation. The creation of role-based groups such as front-office managers and housekeeping encourages collaboration among peers to develop best practices. In one case, an executive chef used Google Sites to share his menu engineering skills with his colleagues, resulting in menu improvements and cost reductions throughout the organization.

Google's platform flexibility has also helped Delta Hotels and Resorts provide broader mobile access to associates. Rodger can now give

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 set-up, minimize maintenance, and reduce IT costs. With Gmail, Google Calendar, and integrated chat, 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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—Michael Rodger, Director of Digital Innovation

users to access to critical data on Apple iPhones, Android-based smartphones and other devices. For instance, bellhops can now check their schedules from home rather than having to come in on their day off. “The average demographic of our employees is late 20s to early 30s. They don’t want to be restricted by technology,” Rodger explains, noting that these improvements have helped reduce turnover and improve employee loyalty.

Delta Hotels and Resorts also plans to use Google Apps document storage to phase out file servers at each property. “It makes no sense to have all this intellectual property sitting on individual servers inaccessible to everyone when we can use Google Apps to share it across the country,” Rodger notes.

Perhaps the biggest win for Delta Hotels and Resorts in opting for Google Apps has been the freedom it has given IT. Instead of spending time maintaining in-house infrastructure and provisioning email addresses, IT can focus on strategic corporate projects.

“Our former parent company had three to four IT folks supporting email and collaboration. We have one, who also has time to manage other things. We’ve been able to keep our support costs low even as the Apps platform continues to add new functionality,” Rodger says.

