



Elders Real Estate improves client service by boosting collaboration with Google Apps for Business



At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Further advance customer service
- Share expertise and information with ease
- Make faster, more informed decisions
- Coordinate smarter to serve clients better
- Accommodate growing mobile user base
- Reduce IT burdens and add more value through technology

What they did

- Rolled out full suite of Google Apps to their franchisees
- Used Gmail, Google Docs, and Google Sites extensively

What they accomplished

- Achieved even better customer outcomes
- Fostered new community-oriented culture
- Shared ideas and expertise across dispersed offices nationwide
- More easily coordinated schedules
- Collaborated on documents and eliminated version confusion
- Supported mobile users
- Virtually eliminated Help Desk calls related to email
- Leveraged vast Google investment and expertise

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—Andrew Simpson, business solutions manager, Elders Real Estate

Company

Elders Real Estate is a leading provider of real estate services in Australia, encompassing rural real estate, residential real estate, property management, and commercial sales and leasing. A branch network of over 320 offices and a highly skilled sales force provide clients with among the most professional and effective real estate and property management services in Australia.

"The primary way we differentiate ourselves at Elders Real Estate is by delivering an unparalleled customer experience and achieving quality outcomes for clients, including both franchisees and their end customers," explains Andrew Simpson, business solutions manager for Elders Real Estate.

Challenge

With hundreds of offices dispersed throughout Australia, Elders Real Estate saw an opportunity in better collaboration and information sharing. This might entail gaining easy access to tips, trends, and expertise or quickly finding the latest documents and forms. It also could mean having visibility into shared calendars to set up appointments with greater ease and efficiency.

Although collaboration is the spark that fires enhanced customer service, information sharing amongst its franchise offices was held back by outmoded technologies. For most franchisees, the company maintained a POP3 mail system that was difficult to configure, issue-prone, and incapable of supporting the rapid proliferation of mobile devices. Calendars were isolated to individuals, making it difficult to make decisions and schedule appointments.

Expertise was traditionally disseminated through an email newsletter that pushed out information, rather than offering tips on-demand. There was no central, searchable repository for training and articles where franchisees could learn about topics of professional interest. Adding to the challenge, the Help Desk spent a significant amount of time responding to a daily stream of franchisee requests for email assistance, rather than on creating valuable business solutions.

Solution

With the aim of fostering a flourishing community environment, Elders Real Estate unanimously selected Google Apps for Business. Drawing on the technical and change management expertise of Premium Google Enterprise Partner Cloud Assist, Elders Real Estate moved to Google Apps for Business and migrated data from their existing POP3 email system.

To ease the transition for those accustomed to using tools such as Microsoft Outlook, Elders Real Estate employed a clever strategy. Each franchise office nominated a champion designated to liaise with head office and assist with the rollout. Broadcast communications to the entire group were supplemented with direct, one-on-one communication through office champions. In tandem, head office worked with Cloud Assist to develop an on-demand video training series on topics ranging from how to set up a mobile phone to work with

About Google Apps

Google Apps is an enterprise-ready suite of applications that includes Gmail, Google Calendar (shared calendaring), Google Docs and Spreadsheets (online document hosting and collaboration), Google Sites (team site creation and publishing), and Google Video* (easy, secure sharing of video content).

*Google Video is not available in all countries.

For more information visit
www.google.com/a

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Google Apps to comparisons of how to complete a task in Gmail versus Microsoft Outlook. According to Simpson, the videos were vital to a smooth migration.

In addition to Gmail, franchisees at Elders Real Estate swiftly adopted Google Docs to share and edit documents, eliminating version confusion. Head office also used Google Sites to set up an intranet where all franchisees have access to the latest training, expertise, and trend information available on a variety of topics, whenever they need to brush up.

Results

Since moving to Google Apps, efficiency and effectiveness are on the rise. Shared calendars help assistants and others make more informed, immediate decisions. Staff no longer have to make multiple phone calls and inquiries; instead, appointments can be scheduled on the spot. Assistants can tap into salespersons' emails as well, promoting coordination that frees up time for more meaningful, face-to-face communications with clientele. On-the-go sales people and property managers have access to the most recent calendars and emails on their mobiles, boosting productivity.

The new intranet offers self-service access to information that is promoting greater collaboration as well. The entire group can share stories and expertise, something that was not possible in the past – and people are now eager to share. "When we had an email newsletter, we constantly tried to drum up articles. But now, people are proactively sharing. With Google Apps, we're seeing a wholesale culture shift toward a more community-based approach," Simpson says. To inform constant evolution and improvement, the team at head office uses Google Analytics to see which information and pages are most helpful.

Although not mentioned or promoted as part of the Google Apps launch, Google Docs took off on its own in what Simpson deems a "mini explosion." Just a few weeks after the rollout, already 100 users were applying Google Docs to edit, share, and collaborate on documents, as well as accessing the most up-to-date versions. And with Google Drive, Simpson expects the applications to broaden even more dramatically.

From an IT standpoint, Google Apps has saved time and headaches, and allowed the team to add value. Due to the predictability of the cloud, franchisees no longer have to worry about backing up email or documents. Help Desk calls related to email have been virtually eliminated, freeing staff time for more strategic endeavours. By moving to the cloud with Google Apps, IT can more rapidly and easily deploy enterprise-grade solutions that make a big difference to the business. They also can leverage Google's vast expertise.

"Take Google and security, for example. As a discrete provider of email, Elders Real Estate could never come close to matching Google's level of expertise and investment. By moving to Google Apps, we benefit from all of Google's rich expertise and technology," says Simpson. "And, although we love the power and ease of the Google technology, we're most amazed by the cultural shift Google Apps is spurring. For a company laser-focused on customer service, the new levels of collaboration we're seeing are brilliant."

