University of Ferrara

"Google Apps provides a great integration platform that has led to increased uptake in other technologies."

Cesare Stefanelli
Head of IT Services

VNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI·STVDI
DI·FERRARA

ABOUT GOOGLE APPS

Google Apps is a suite of applications that includes Gmail, Google Calendar (shared calendaring), Google Talk (instant messaging and voice over IP), Google Docs & Spreadsheets (online document hosting and collaboration), Google Sites (team site creation and publishing), Start Page (a single, customizable access point for all applications), Google Video, and Google Security & Compliance. Google Apps offers editions tailored to specific customer needs, including the Standard Edition (ideal for family domains), Education Edition (K-12 schools, colleges and universities) and Premier Edition (businesses of all sizes).

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

Overview

Founded in 1391, the University of Ferrara is one of the oldest universities in the world. Its eight faculties and 19 departments are located across the city of Ferrara, Italy, whose historical centre is included in the UNESCO World Heritage list. The University of Ferrara is a city campus, offering its students a lively and challenging learning and research environment for the study of Architecture, Engineering, Economics, Humanities, Law, Medicine, Pharmacy, and Science. In the 2007 report by the Italian Committee for Research Evaluation (CIVR), the University of Ferrara ranked first among Italian universities in applied research and technology transfer.

Challenge

In 2004 the University of Ferrara decided to speed up the introduction of IT services as a way of improving quality in teaching, research and administration. As a result, in the following years, it deployed a number of online services for both students and staff. These included a new University Portal, an improved version of the University email service, a VoIP (Open Source) phone system and a Web fax service.

Although these tools only required a single sign-on for authentication, they were accessible via different interfaces and from different areas of the University portal. This lack of integration hindered wider adoption of these services and students complained that it was difficult to exploit the full potential of services, each of them designed with a specific interface. Some of the services were even difficult to find inside the University Portal that consists of more than 200 independently managed sites. The University felt it was important to improve the usability of online services and to provide an easy access to the key applications.

Solution

The University of Ferrara decided to provide each user with a personalised web page with all the services the University offers and capable of storing user generated data and documents. This personal web based desktop provides a uniform interface to the University services and also a single point of access to the most important ones.

"Our goal was to allow any user to simply access his or her personal web desktop, from any device, anywhere, at any time and with any operating system," Cesare Stefanelli, Head of IT Services, delegated by the Rector at the University of Ferrara, explained. "When Google launched Google Apps, we immediately felt that this was the product which could help us achieve our goal."

"Google Apps has transformed our entire online services offering. It has allowed us to roll out powerful collaboration services, while making cost savings of €60,000 per year."

The University completed the Google Apps deployment to all of its 20,000 students in December 2007 and started the deployment to its staff and faculty members in July 2008. The deployment of Google Apps has been very easy, with an unusual surprise at the IT helpdesk: they received enthusiastic emails in support of the installation instead of the usual problem reports.

Product

Google Apps for Education featuring Google Mail™, Google Calendar™, Google Docs™, Google Sites™, and Google Talk™.

Benefits

Google Apps has already proved itself to be an effective communications and collaboration tool, and the University is now using it as a programming platform for application development and integration.

Outsourcing email to Google has freed up budget and also released IT staff that would have otherwise had to work on supporting the email system. The IT staff can now concentrate on facilitating the widespread adoption of Google Apps products and on developing new mash-up applications. Individual Google Apps products are quickly becoming central tools for both Academics/Staff and students. For instance, Google Calendar has rapidly become the standard tool for arranging staff meetings, while Google Docs is transforming how teachers interact with students (by sharing documents and exploiting forms).

"Google Apps is very flexible, which we use to our full advantage," said Stefanelli. "It provides the application programming interface to integrate different applications and to mash-up Google services with internal University data." Students are able to access all the main services provided by both Google and the University, such as personalised course schedules based on the specific laurea degree and year taught.

"Google Apps is very flexible, which we use to our full advantage. It provides the application programming interface to integrate different applications and to make mash-ips using Google services with internal University data."

"Google Apps has transformed our entire online services offering. It has allowed us to roll out powerful collaboration services, while making cost savings of €60,000 per year," said Stefanelli. "Even more importantly from our perspective, it provides a great integration platform that has led to increased uptake in other technologies. For example, figures show that our web based VoIP/fax solution has seen a sharp increase in usage since the implementation of Google Apps."

"The University of Ferrara is one of the oldest education institutions in the world and while we take great pride in our traditions, we have our eyes set firmly on the future. We want to provide our students and staff an unparalleled experience and we realise that technology is a key enabler. Google Apps has helped us to make a giant step in the right direction," concludes Stefanelli.