

Google Apps helps students and staff at Inoorero University to connect, collaborate and innovate



At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Implement a system which could support growth, collaboration and innovation within the university
- Reduce IT expenditure

What they did

- Implement Google Apps for Education and Postini Message Discovery

What they accomplished

- Improved learning experience for all students
- Real-time collaboration on tasks across the campus
- Impressive cost savings
- Reduced IT administration

Customer

Founded in 1983, Inoorero University (IU) is now a leading technology university, specialising in ICT training, business and law. Based in Nairobi, Kenya, IU today consists of 2,000 students and 100 staff. The University provides learners with the academic resources, facilities and support that they need to achieve the highest scholarly levels and has built a reputation for preparing students for the world of business and fostering entrepreneurial skills.

Challenge

Having achieved university status in September 2009, IU had begun to outgrow its legacy web-based email system, which was failing to meet the demands of the growing campus. In particular, the storage facility of the legacy system was placing restrictive limits on the email accounts of staff and students. At the same time, the user interface of the system was outdated, not particularly user-friendly and lacked collaborative features. To add any new features on top of the system, the administrator would have to install a plug-in which would be both costly and time-consuming.

The IU board felt that these issues were not only causing administrative difficulties, they were also hindering learning and research and therefore needed to be addressed.

David Ajowi, Webmaster for IU, explains, “We wanted a system that would increase collaboration and interaction between staff and students while at the same time reducing IT expenditure and decreasing the time we were spending on upgrades and maintenance work.”

Solution

Having reviewed several options, IU's management board made the decision to switch to Google Apps for Education, the free communication and collaboration suite, which is hosted online.

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—David Ajowi, Webmaster for IU

Google trainers were on hand at all times to assist with the roll-out procedure from start to finish. This included advising on the most appropriate security measures for IU's needs, leading to the adoption of SAML-based SSO Authentication.

“Thanks to the advice and support of the Google team, the transition was done seamlessly, with not one existing user losing data and no connectivity issues,” says Ajowi. “The Google email migration tool made moving all the accounts over incredibly easy.”

About Google Apps for Education

Google Apps delivers the advanced technology university students need to communicate and collaborate, without the cost and complexity of maintaining on-site hardware and software, and all free of charge and ads. Google Apps offers simple, powerful communication and collaboration tools for universities of any size – all hosted by Google to streamline setup, minimise maintenance, increase integration and reduce IT costs. With Gmail, Google Calendar, and integrated IM, users can stay connected and study 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 organised and available wherever and whenever users study.

For more information visit:
www.google.com/apps/edu

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Google staff trained up an implementation team from IU who, in turn, trained the students and staff in all aspects of the service. Changeover and awareness campaigns were a key part of helping everyone become accustomed to the potential of the new service.

To ensure everyone would gain the full range of benefits from the service, lectures were run on a regular basis at IU by trained administrators giving tips on how to make the most of the Google Apps services on offer.

"At first some staff were reluctant to move to a new way of working, but when they fully understood the benefits they really welcomed the change," Ajowi explains. "Encouraging our students to adopt the service was easier. Many already use Google products in their personal lives and are familiar with the interface."

Results

The University has fully embraced the range of collaborative tools Google Apps offers, which include: Gmail, Docs, Talk and Video. This has led to a number of changes in the way lecturers interact with students. Some lecturers are using Google Apps within their classes to give them easy access to the information they need to share with students during lectures. Others have set up their own Google Sites, where they can post assignments and share class-related materials.

"We've really got the staff hooked on the service now to the extent that they are using the features in Google Apps as learning tools – many are giving out assignments by sharing them on Google Docs, scheduling assessment tests on the Calendar service and collaborating with one another on presentations," adds Ajowi.

The reception from students has been even more positive. Many students have become accustomed to using Google Docs, which allows multiple entries in real time to a single document, to share notes amongst each other. They have also been running virtual meetings via Google Groups so they can discuss assignments and group projects.

The IU has been encouraging students to register their mobile numbers to their Google Apps accounts so that they can receive SMS notifications about their schedules and deadlines. "We've had some very positive feedback from this innovation, which is helping students attend all their classes and ensure they get their work done on time," says Ajowi.

Beyond these exciting collaborative efforts, the technology is benefiting the establishment from a financial perspective. "The savings we have made since moving to Google Apps for Business have been tremendous. We no longer pay for a hosted webmail service which cost us 125,000 Kenyan shillings a year (\$1,500), and we have also made some significant savings in our ICT infrastructure" says Ajowi. "On top of this, we've made savings in the cost of printing documents as we all use Google Docs to share and collaborate within meetings."

"Our IT team spends less of their time on maintenance, too. We aren't scratching our heads any more over issues such as email spam and viruses as Google's Postini Message Discovery service takes care of all this for us."

This is only the beginning according to Ajowi: "We've been hugely impressed with all the benefits we've seen so far from using Google Apps, from improved collaboration between students and teachers to the extensive cost savings. We're now working on integrating Google Apps with Moodle, our virtual learning environment, which we believe will result in an even more valuable learning experience for our students."

