



Pioneer State Leads Again with Cloud Adoption

Google Apps much more than an email solution: "It's about collaboration"

A study released in December 2011 by 24/7 Wall Street, a Delaware-based Internet financial news and opinion company, ranks how well states are managed based on a substantial collection of data. Performance indicators include financial health, debt per capita, credit rating, population without health insurance, unemployment, crime rate and educational options. Entitled *"Best and Worst Run States in America — An Analysis of All 50,"* the state of Wyoming holds the coveted distinction of the best-run U.S. state.

This particular accolade probably doesn't surprise many Wyomingites. The Pioneer State boasts an impressive list of firsts: first state granting women the right to vote (1870), first state with a county library system (1886) and home of the first National Park (Yellowstone) established by Congress in 1872.

Wyoming CIO Flint Waters explains that the state holds itself to a higher standard relative to technology, as well. "We don't measure ourselves based on what other states are doing. That's not a high enough standard. We measure ourselves against other corporations, and that requires strong executive leadership."

That leadership is clear with the recent rollout of Google Apps for Government, a set of cloud-based collaboration tools now in use by the 10,000-member workforce of the state of Wyoming. Gov. Matt Mead's office led the way as the first to migrate. The phased process took a total of nine months for the entire state organization to transition.

Impetus for Change

As is common in many large, geographically diverse enterprises, Wyoming state agencies had little uniting their IT environment prior to the Google Apps adoption. There were more than a dozen email platforms, no standard naming conventions or common address book and huge variations in email retention policies.

A competitive RFP process spanning two years led to the Google solution for Wyoming. Google Apps for Government is a comprehensive package of productivity applications that includes email, 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.

Beyond Email

Waters acknowledges that this move is a significant culture change, but he encourages organizations considering Google Apps to see beyond its email capabilities — and not to sell it short to their employees. "Let folks know this is not just a shift in email," says Waters. "This is so much more than that. This is something that is going to make them more efficient — it's giving them a much greater toolset with which to invest in themselves."

He offers his own experience as proof, in an example repeated frequently across the organization. "I'm in Google Docs writing a paragraph and I can

see what's being done two paragraphs down. Something someone else is writing might trigger my thinking and now we're collaborating in real time with geographical disparity. They can be 400 miles away at the other end of the state, and I'm benefitting from their intellect. And that is such a huge change in how we communicate and how we work. It has been monumental."

Million-Dollar Savings

With a low per-person cost of less than \$5 per month, the Google Apps toolset enables savings on software licenses, and significantly reduces server purchase and maintenance costs. For Wyoming, though, the largest savings is in staff salaries. The previous environment required 15 full-time employees across the state devoted to managing mail servers and solutions. Google Apps makes it possible to reduce this number to 1.5 positions through attrition — and Waters describes this cost savings estimate as conservative. Long-term savings resulting from increased productivity — while difficult to quantify — will likely be significantly higher.



Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead (center), with CIO Flint Waters (right), cuts a data cord to symbolize the state moving to cloud computing.

Gaining Momentum

While Wyoming was the first state to move its entire workforce to Google Apps, public agencies at all levels are implementing the solution. Large cities like Pittsburgh, Pa., and Orlando, Fla., have gone Google, along with Multnomah County, Ore., and Larimer County, Colo. Other early adopters include the state of Utah and federal agencies, including the General Services Administration and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

As concerns about perceived security vulnerabilities of cloud solutions are alleviated, many prominent law enforcement agencies are also adopting Google Apps. In fact, Google's was the first suite of cloud-based email and collaboration applications to receive a "moderate" Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) certification.

Indeed, Waters used to count himself among the skeptics that a cloud solution could adequately protect the security and privacy of government information commonly transmitted via email. The former head of the state's Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, Waters and his team thoroughly researched the security of Google's data centers and the kinds of information the state would entrust to them. Ultimately, he found the state's data to be more secure with Google Apps than with its previous LAN-based file servers. This confidence has proven contagious among Wyoming state agencies.

"There are occasions where there will be privileged communications, like between a public defender and their client, for example, and we have to be able to protect that communication from end to end," notes Waters. "We are better able to do that with Google than with what we had in place before."

Technology Gets Out of the Way

Customer-focused organizations, like the state of Wyoming, aspire to address constituent inquiries and communications as swiftly and effectively as possible. Using the collaboration capabilities of Google Apps, together with Google's application programming interface, the IT team in the governor's office developed a customer communications system to efficiently manage public requests.

A short three-month development process resulted in a transparent system where staff can assign tasks, route communications through Gmail, and place follow-up items on stakeholders' calendars — ensuring timely, optimal resolution. Even the governor himself can use his tablet device to keep pace with constituent concerns from anywhere with an Internet connection. "Overall, Google supports our culture of innovation and makes it easier for us to rapidly create new solutions that improve our responsiveness and agility," says Enterprise Application Development Manager Bob Mathews.

In another example, Wyoming is using Google Apps to help increase Internet connectivity to communities throughout the state. Leveraging Google's GIS solutions, IT leaders can click on any community to reference a map that visually identifies available broadband. State leaders can work with local community leaders to help identify gaps and make an effective case for vendors to increase fiber capacity. "With this tool, we can say to a vendor 'Look — here is this customer base. You have a very brief ROI if you increase capacity for this community,'" explains Waters.

Waters is optimistic that Wyoming will continue to find creative ways to enhance services using Google Apps. "Each day, it becomes less and less about the technology and more about the business challenge that each group is solving," Waters concludes. "There's just one after another of those types of examples and that's where the excitement builds."