

Hamilton Health Sciences Cures Communication Woes with Microsoft Unified Communication

Overview

Country or Region: Canada

Industry: Health Care

Customer Profile

Hamilton Health Sciences is a family of six hospitals and a cancer centre, serving more than 2.3 million residents of Hamilton and Central South and Central West Ontario.

Business Situation

Faced with an aging PBX infrastructure, Hamilton Health Sciences needed a unified communications system that would allow staff to be contacted anywhere so that they could quickly track down resources.

Solution

The health care organization deployed Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007, Microsoft Office Communicator 2007 and Exchange Unified Messaging to its IT and research groups.

Benefits

- Enhanced communications
- Greater staff productivity
- Familiar and easy-to-integrate
- Enhanced security
- Platform for the future

“With the Microsoft solution, Hamilton Health had the experience and the comfort to manage the system from day one.”

Joe Buonvivere, Managing Consultant, CCSI Technology Solutions

With a family of six hospitals and a cancer centre, Hamilton Health Sciences offers one of the most comprehensive health care systems in Canada. The organization needed a unified communications system that allowed them to quickly track down staff, wherever they were located. Faced with limited funding and resources, however, the hospital could not afford to replace its aging PBX infrastructure. To address the issue, Hamilton Health Sciences deployed Microsoft® Office Communications Server 2007, Microsoft Office Communicator 2007 and Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging, beginning with the IT department and a research group. The streamlined communications platform is helping staff become more productive by providing the ability to access emails and voicemails anytime, anywhere.

Situation

Hamilton Health Sciences is a family of six hospitals and a cancer centre that serves more than 2.3 million residents of Hamilton and Central South and Central West Ontario. Each of the hospitals has specific areas of expertise and, together, they make Hamilton Health Sciences one of the most comprehensive health care systems in Canada.

Hamilton Health Services has nearly \$500-million worth of new construction and renovation projects underway, including two new buildings and the reconstruction of the Henderson General Hospital. However, the aging Private Branch Exchange (PBX) infrastructure presented a challenge. As it moved into these projects, the hospital wanted to replace it with an upgraded communications system. Faced with limited funding and resources, however, the hospital could not afford to replace the PBX infrastructure all at once.

“Our environment has antiquated PBXs with a few digital-ready devices. But due to budget constraints, we needed a way to gradually introduce new technology,” says Mark Farrow, Chief Information Officer and Assistant Vice President, Information Communications Technologies.

Compatibility was another issue. Of the 11,000 users at Hamilton Health Sciences, four to five thousand regularly use the Microsoft® Office Outlook® 2007 messaging and collaboration client and Microsoft Exchange Server 2007, along with applications based on Microsoft Office. Whatever solution the health care organization chose, it needed to work easily with the tools and applications staff had come to rely on.

“We wanted to take advantage of our current technology investments, both from the

network and the software side. We are heavily invested in the Microsoft Office system so the solution had to work easily with our existing applications platform,” says Farrow.

Solution

Hamilton Health Sciences approached CCSI Technology Solutions to help find a suitable unified communications solution. After researching other vendors, CCSI recommended a solution based on Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007, Microsoft Office Communicator 2007 and Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging. This allowed the organization to build on its existing Exchange 2007 and 2007 Office system infrastructure.

Office Communications Server 2007 provides Voice over IP, instant messaging and audio and video conferencing functionality. It also brings the features together with presence, a status indicator that conveys the availability of people on a network.

“We looked quite closely at one of the competitors and found that the ongoing costs would have been much higher than the cost of using Office Communications Server,” says Joe Buonvivere, Managing Consultant, CCSI Technology Solutions. “Because Hamilton Health Sciences had not worked with other vendors, the organization would have had to rely on third parties to do the work. With the Microsoft solution, Hamilton Health had the experience and the comfort to manage the system from day one.”

Hamilton Health Sciences was also impressed by the solution’s compatibility with its existing Microsoft infrastructure.

“We have more than 30 PBXs in our environment and our goal is to slowly take them out of service until they’re gone,” says Farrow. “That way, we can bring people up to

speed in a new environment that they're already comfortable with, and wean them off the old system as we dismantle it."

Working with CCSI, Hamilton Health Sciences began the deployment in June 2008 and had the system up and running within three weeks. The organization rolled out the new functionality to 340 people in the IT and research departments with plans to expand the user-base in the coming months.

Benefits

Since implementing Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging, Office Communications Server 2007 and Office Communicator 2007, Hamilton Health Sciences has increased staff productivity and improved the return on its technology investments. As well, the organization now has a communication platform that over time will help employees connect with each other more efficiently.

Enhanced communications

With Office Communicator 2007, Hamilton Health Sciences has streamlined communications by enabling staff to switch between different modes of communication and introduce people into the conversation through the one-click actions, and presence information.

"With Office Communicator, I can send an instant message to my management team to start a conversation, but when I need to do a conference call, I can get all of them immediately online with the click of a button," says Farrow. "It saves us from having to coordinate a separate conference call."

Greater staff productivity

Users who were often out of touch are now easily connected. Exchange Server 2007 provides a common message store for voice mails and emails that is accessible through Outlook 2007. This constant access to messages has helped to boost productivity.

Features such as presence and instant messaging have also helped reduce the volume of email and enable users to quickly find the people they need.

"Workers can quickly find the staff they need and determine whether they are available. As well, they can use instant messaging to ask a question and receive an instant response, instead of getting into an email trail," says Farrow. "This can be quickly escalated to a voice call – and they can do it all in one place."

The Microsoft unified communications solution complements the hospital's existing wireless network. As a result, users are no longer tied to their desks, and can be productive while mobile.

"Now workers can hold impromptu meetings with their wireless laptops, or use their Bluetooth headset to answer their telephone calls as they walk down the corridor. The new system has really helped," says Farrow.

Familiar and easy-to-integrate

The new unified messaging solution works easily with desktop software like Microsoft Word, which helped simplify integration with Hamilton Health Sciences' legacy infrastructure and allowed the organization to take advantage of its existing technology investments.

"We looked at other solutions that leveraged components of Office Communications Server or had their own stack of toolsets. However, the Microsoft-based unified communications solution was the easiest to deploy and integrate into the hospital's back office," says Buonvivre.

The ease of integration between Exchange Server 2007 unified messaging and the

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hospital's IT system simplified the implementation process.

"People are very comfortable with the platform," says Farrow. "Because Exchange Server 2007 is a Microsoft product, we were very familiar with the deployment process and that allowed us to move quickly."

As Hamilton Health continues to grow its business, the Exchange Server and Microsoft Unified Communications solutions not only provide productivity and mobility enhancements today, they also allow Hamilton Health Sciences to scale up without incurring major costs.

Platform for the future

With more than 11,000 employees across six campuses, communication proved to be an ongoing challenge, especially for the hospital's "corridor warriors" – the physicians, nurses and administrators who cannot afford to stay tethered to their desks. The Microsoft unified communications system now offers Hamilton Health Sciences a platform that makes it easy for corridor warriors to collaborate in real-time, and to roll out unified communications to the rest of the organization over time, as budget allows. "With the new system, we will soon be able to quickly track down the people we need," says Farrow.

Microsoft Office System

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Software and Services

- Microsoft Office Communication Server 2007
- Microsoft Office Communication Server 2007
- Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 Enterprise Edition
- Microsoft Office Communicator 2007