

County Government Easily Archives, Accesses, Restores Terabyte of Messaging Data

Palm Beach County wanted to migrate off Novell GroupWise to Microsoft® Exchange Server 2007—but it needed a comprehensive archiving solution as well. That's what it has with Mimosa NearPoint from Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Mimosa Systems. More than a terabyte of information is readily available to end-users and administrators through simple search, restores are achieved in 15 minutes, and the county has gained a disaster recovery solution as well.

Business Needs

Florida's fast-growing Palm Beach County maintained two e-mail systems—Novell GroupWise and the Microsoft® Office Outlook® messaging and collaboration client— and decided to standardize on the Microsoft environment.

“We regarded GroupWise as a legacy system that we wanted to migrate from,” says Santhosh Samuel, Server Manager, Palm Beach County Information Support Services. “The Web applications we were writing internally were a better fit for Microsoft Exchange Server and Microsoft Office Outlook. And we are a Microsoft-centric IT operation. It made more sense to migrate from GroupWise to Exchange Server and Outlook.”

In particular, migrating from GroupWise to Exchange Server and Office Outlook became imperative as Palm Beach County sought to comply with the state's so-called sunshine law, which required unlimited data retention.

“We were challenged to implement an e-mail system capable of producing the public records required by these legal regulations,” says Samuel. “We felt that Microsoft was the best solution for providing Palm Beach County with the ever-expanding archive that it needed for e-mail, particularly an archive that would enable immediate access to any information stored in it.”

That's when Palm Beach County began to consider its archiving alternatives. It looked at systems including CommVault, Quest, and Symantec. Most of these choices accomplished e-mail archiving through the use of journaling, which put an additional load on the e-mail server and did not provide an easy way to restore a mailbox if that should prove necessary. Nor did Palm Beach County want a system that would archive only e-mail messages and ignore calendar items, to-do lists, contact names, and other messaging information.

Solution

Palm Beach County considered several solutions, including Mimosa NearPoint from Microsoft Gold Certified Partner Mimosa Systems, running on the Windows Server® operating system and supporting Microsoft Exchange Server. Samuel and his colleagues were impressed by the Mimosa architecture, which would send archived data to storage hardware without putting an additional strain on the e-mail servers.

They also saw NearPoint as a comprehensive solution that would archive all of their messaging content, rather than just e-mail messages. NearPoint also provides disaster recovery capabilities, easy search and retrieval, and tools to facilitate the migration from GroupWise.

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Santhosh Samuel, Server Manager, Palm Beach County Information Support Services

Customer: Palm Beach County

Customer Size: 7,000 emp.

Country or Region: USA

Industry: Government

Customer Profile

Palm Beach County is located in the state of Florida. It has more than 1.35 million people. It is the third-most populous county in Florida and the 29th most populous in the United States.

Software and Services

Microsoft Server Product Portfolio

- MS Exchange Server 2007 SP1
- MS SQL Server 2005
- Windows Server 2003

Microsoft Office

- MS Office Outlook 2007

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To confirm NearPoint’s capabilities, especially compared to the chief alternatives, Palm Beach County decided to run a “bakeoff” or lab test comparison. In the lab installation, Mimosa NearPoint was up and running quickly, mirroring the experience that Palm Beach County would have when it deployed the software flawlessly in just a few days.

NearPoint tools facilitated the migration to Exchange Server 2007 SP1 on Windows Server 2003. The software uses Microsoft Office Outlook 2007 to provide a user-friendly front-end to the archive folder, and to the NearPoint Web page, which enables users to easily conduct searches for stored information. Administrators can access and configure the solution using the standard Microsoft Management Console.

The NearPoint software is supported on the same computer that runs the county’s Exchange Server deployment, eliminating the need to buy and maintain an additional server. Instead of archiving the e-mail on that computer, the NearPoint software ships it to a cluster of storage-area network devices every four hours. Mail is kept in Exchange Server PST files for 90 days, and then maintained solely in NearPoint.

The solution supports Palm Beach County’s 7,000 public employees and currently holds approximately 1.2 terabytes of data. The county is implementing the migration in waves, with the solution scaling out cost-effectively as needed to support the ever-growing e-mail archive.

Benefits

Palm Beach County has seen a host of benefits from its use of Mimosa NearPoint—including benefits it expected and benefits that it didn’t.

In the expected category, the software provided a relatively straightforward way for the county to migrate to Exchange Server and to meet the requirements of the state’s sunshine law. “We’ve tested the audit capability of NearPoint and it’s painless,” says Samuel. “We can easily retrieve anything we need to, without taking time away from HR or Legal to conduct a time-consuming search.”

The solution has also provided a disaster recovery capability for e-mail that the county never had before. “The disaster recovery capability has really impressed me,” says Samuel. “In the past, if we had a major problem, we’d have to build another server and do a time-consuming restore from tape. With NearPoint and Exchange Server, our tests show we can recover from an outage in just 15 minutes.”

Samuel didn’t expect NearPoint to enhance the performance of Exchange Server—but it has. “Our Exchange Server runs faster because it’s lighter—we’ve moved most of our e-mail messages off the server and into NearPoint,” he says. “That enables us to optimize the performance of Exchange Server.”

The enhanced speed of Exchange Server is a particular benefit to Palm Beach County, since it has offices spread throughout the county, often connecting to the main data center using relatively slow connections.

As befits a solution that Samuel says is easy to use, NearPoint has not required a lot of training for end-users.

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