



CNIB Continues its Communication and Collaboration Mandate with Unified Messaging

Overview

Country: Canada

Industry: Non-Profit

Customer Profile

CNIB is a nationwide, community-based, registered charity committed to research, public education and vision health for all Canadians.

Business Situation

CNIB depends on email and voice mail to stay connected to clients and needed a more intuitive and cost-effective infrastructure to support its communication needs.

Solution

With Microsoft® Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging, CNIB now has more flexible access to voice mail – staff can read email messages and listen to voice mail within Microsoft Office Outlook, or access to voice mail – staff can read email messages and listen to voice mail within Microsoft Office Outlook, or access email over the phone.

Benefits

- Enhanced Communications
- Better Efficiency, Reduced Costs
- Increased Staff Productivity

“The system is making an immediate impact in improving collaboration and communication across the organization. It’s helping us to better meet our mandate of helping those living with vision loss.”

Vicki Mains, Director, IS Systems Operations, CNIB

CNIB is a nationwide, community-based, registered charity committed to research, public education and vision health for all Canadians. CNIB depends on email, voice mail and instant messaging to stay connected to clients and the workplace. With offices all across Canada and more than 1,100 employees and 10,000 volunteers, including people living with vision loss, the organization needed a more intuitive and cost-effective infrastructure to support its communication needs. To improve productivity, CNIB deployed Microsoft® Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging. CNIB now has more flexible access to voice mail – staff can read email messages and listen to voice mail within Microsoft Office Outlook® or listen to email over the phone. As a result, CNIB is benefiting from better communication, increased efficiencies and an estimated 60 per cent gain in productivity.

Situation

As president and CEO of CNIB, Jim Sanders is the driving force behind the organization's mandate to help individuals who are living with vision loss to enjoy a good quality of life. CNIB is a community-based, non-profit organization that provides services and programs including public education, consumer products, peer support and one of the world's largest libraries for people with print disabilities. Sanders, who is blind, runs CNIB by constantly asking one simple question: "Is what I am doing going to improve the lives of Canadians with vision loss?"

CNIB employs more than 1,100 staff across Canada who work in the fields of life-skills training, library services, research, advocacy, public education, accessible design consulting, fundraising and administration. As such, CNIB recognized long ago that effective communication and collaboration is vital to the organization's continued success.

"For CNIB, messaging technologies, such as email, are critical tools for internal communication among staff and external communication with clients," says Sanders. "We're heavily dependent on voice mail and email to deliver vital initiatives and stay connected."

Under its previous system, CNIB workers with vision loss were using speech output technology to listen to Microsoft Outlook® email and collaboration client calendar data on their desktop or mobile devices –a tedious and often unproductive process. In addition, the organization's voice mail and PBX systems were separate from the email system.

"We wanted to find a way to enable our staff to spend less time manually checking their

calendars and more time on client service by having voice mails automatically arrive into their email inbox," says Vicki Mains, Director, System Operations, CNIB. "We switch so often between voice and email communications that finding a more seamless way to integrate the two modes was really important to us."

In addition, with data and voice content hosted on separate servers, it was difficult for CNIB's IT department to quickly and easily make changes to the system, such as adding additional employees to the voice mail system.

"Consolidating our voicemail into our messaging environment means that it's now much easier to easily make changes. For example, with email residing on one server and voicemail on another, it meant a task like adding additional employees had to be duplicated on both systems. Now it just needs to be done once," explains Mains.

Working with Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner WolfBridge TSS, CNIB reviewed its communications infrastructure to identify a solution that would be intuitive and cost-effective, while at the same time simplifying management for its IT team. WolfBridge TSS recommended that CNIB look at a unified messaging solution that could replace its outdated voice mail system and provide workers with a better way to access important data and messages.

Solution

After looking at several different vendors and messaging environments, CNIB selected Microsoft® Exchange Server 2007 Unified Messaging, in part because it was able to integrate seamlessly with its existing Active Directory® directory service and Exchange Server 2003 environment while at the same

time providing employees with the added benefits of unified messaging at no additional cost. The integrated unified messaging system also enables site and server consolidation, reducing the total number of servers required to provide voice mail and email service.

“Since CNIB employees were already using Exchange Server 2003, implementing Exchange Server 2007, which includes unified messaging, to the new environment was a relatively seamless process,” explains Angus Young, Senior Technical Consultant, WolfBridge TSS.

With the unified messaging infrastructure in place, CNIB employees can access voicemail, email, calendar, and contacts over any phone and also have voice messages and faxes delivered directly to their email inboxes.

“We were able to transition all 1,100 user mailboxes to the new unified messaging system in only a few weeks,” says Vicki Mains, IT, CNIB. “The new system allows us to operate in an environment where all modes of communication can be accessed from a single location.”

Benefits

With the unified messaging in Exchange Server 2007, CNIB expects to deliver more efficient administration and increase staff productivity by over 60 per cent.

“There was an immediate smile on our president’s face,” recalls Mains. “We see the system making an immediate impact in improving collaboration and communication across the organization. It’s ultimately helping us to better meet our mandate of helping those living with vision loss.”

Enhanced Communications

Using Exchange Server 2007 CNIB employees are able to access their voice mail as email attachments in their Outlook inboxes, reducing the need to check multiple devices for messages. In addition, staff can open each voicemail individually within their email as needed by priority.

“Providing an enhanced level of communication for staff makes performing day-to-day tasks so much easier. It’s been huge in terms of raising the level of service we can provide to clients,” says Mains.

Creating Efficiencies

Before the new system, people’s calendars were accessible using speech output technology. It was a task that was doable, but certainly not easy or quick, “With the new Outlook Voice Access capabilities, it is so much faster and easier to access and change your calendars – no matter where you are,” says Mains.

The ability for staff to access messages and calendars anytime, anywhere has helped to boost productivity at CNIB. Using Outlook Voice Access, staff have found it more convenient to manage their entire email system, especially their calendars. Because of this, CNIB plans to increase its complement of staff using devices based on Windows Mobile 5.0, providing them with the same access to information on-the-go as they would have at the office. In addition, Windows Mobile connects directly with Exchange Server, which supports direct push of corporate email and wiping of devices. This helps CNIB have better control of its vital information.

Increased Staff Productivity

Perhaps the most appealing benefit of the new Exchange Server 2007 environment is the Speech-Enabled Automated Attendant feature within Outlook Voice Access, which

answers calls through an automated operator and global address list directory services. CNIB staff can use this feature via touch-tone menus or speech recognition using their own voice. In addition, the Outlook Voice Access capability to convert text to speech enables callers to have email, calendar, personal contacts and other information read to them.

“Employees no longer need to switch from their computer to desktop phones to retrieve voicemail messages. We now have access to a rich, highly secure email, unified messaging/voicemail, calendars, attachments, contacts and more – no matter where we are or what application we are running, or what type of device we are using,” says Debbie Gillespie, Manager, Braille Publishing, CNIB. “This helps me focus on providing better and faster client service.”

Easy To Set Up, Easy To Use

According to CNIB, the Exchange Server System is more manageable and more reliable than any system it has previously experienced. The ease of integration with its existing IT system meant that implementing the system was virtually painless. With only a few clicks of a button, Exchange Server 2007 was up and running and the familiar interface meant that staff could start reaping the benefits from the moment it was installed.

“We didn’t need to hold any training. Our staff were up and running in minutes with very little training,” says Mains. “The look on our CEO’s face when he tried the system was priceless. He had looked at numerous products in the past, but they were always limiting. He couldn’t believe there was actually a general market solution available that could truly make a difference to both his own life and the productivity of the

organization. It is a great example of Universal Access Design.”

The environment also allows consolidation of voice messaging infrastructure - it takes advantage of existing investment in Exchange servers, training and infrastructure components. Exchange Unified Messaging also delivers anywhere access from Microsoft Office Outlook®, Outlook Web Access, mobile devices and ordinary telephones through Outlook Voice Access.

As CNIB continues to look at ways to assist Canadians living with vision loss, the Microsoft unified messaging solution positions it to extend and evolve its telephony capabilities without large additional costs or time investments.

For More Information

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For more information about CNIB products and services, call or visit the Web site at: 1-800-563-2642 <http://www.cnib.ca>

For more information about WolfBridge TSS products and services, call 1-800-821-2286 or visit the Web site www.itergy.com

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Microsoft Server Product Portfolio

For more information about the Microsoft server product portfolio, go to: www.microsoft.com/servers/default.aspx

For more information about Microsoft Exchange Server, go to: www.microsoft.com/exchange

Software & Services

- Microsoft® Exchange Server 2007
- Microsoft Outlook Voice Access

Partners

- WolfBridge TSS.

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