Businesses that switch to Google Apps see reduced IT overhead and improvements in employee productivity

CUSTOMERS:

- **BravePoint:** an 110-person IT consulting company in Georgia

- **Lake View Concrete:** a construction manufacturer based in Iowa with 58 employees

- **Prudential Carolina Real Estate:** a leading residential brokerage in the metro Charleston, SC area with 1,300 sales associates and staff

- **Theikos:** a leading Software as a Service consulting firm with over 90 consultants in offices in US, Singapore, and India

- **CDI Head Start:** an 190-person non-profit serving the needs of underprivileged children in Northeast Arkansas

Goal: Minimize IT overhead and maximize employee productivity

Challenge: Migrate from existing solution to Google Apps with minimal interruption

> "Google Apps provides a mobile communication solution for our sales associates that we cannot match with other products."
>
> **Les Sease**
> IT Director

Lower costs and increased business agility are competitive imperatives in today's business world. Many businesses are improving their processes and bottom-line results by migrating from server-based email and collaboration solutions to Google Apps, Google's suite of hosted applications for communication and collaboration.

Before Google Apps

Each business had specific goals and considerations in mind when deciding to adopt Google Apps. Prudential Carolina Real Estate was using a server-based back-end email system with webmail on the front end. "We were running out of email storage and had to either expand the old platform or move to a new one," explains IT Director Les Sease. "We chose Google Apps because it gives our agents and staff more online storage and superior mobility – Gmail makes email available from anywhere."

IT Manager Tim Oppenheim was new to CDI Head Start, and one of his first goals was to establish a lighter IT infrastructure. "Our funding has remained flat for several years, so we do not have the money to invest in networking, licensing and maintenance for traditional-style applications," says Oppenheim. "We looked into hosted solutions aside from Google Apps, but they were cost-prohibitive. Google Apps provided a full-featured collaboration solution at virtually no cost."

Like the other companies, Lake View Concrete wanted to simplify its IT infrastructure and reduce costs. "I came from an enterprise where we used traditional-style email and calendaring, so I was painfully aware of the costs associated with maintaining onsite and remote servers and software clients," explains General Manager David Schmidgall. "With Google Apps, we knew that everyone could access their calendars and email from any computer with Internet access. We would have the added benefit of having attachments scanned for viruses."

> "With Google Apps, we can focus on our core business instead of our IT infrastructure. Google Apps makes sense, saves money and works a lot better for us. What's not to love?"

At Theikos, CEO Jason Masciarelli wanted to move to a pure SaaS model and was looking for an alternative. All of the company's systems were web-based, on-demand solutions, with the notable exception of a hosted email server. According to Masciarelli, Google Apps was a natural choice to replace the hosted server because of its robust webmail client, integrated collaboration tools and built-in instant messaging capabilities. Further, Google Docs could prove to be a powerful collaboration tool for globally dispersed project teams.

For their part, the BravePoint IT team was spending an inordinate amount of time dealing with spam, and was looking to find a communication and collaboration solution that was secure as well as easy to use and manage – and they found Google Apps.

APPROACHES TO TRANSITION:

- Migrate swiftly while educating users about what to expect, even running both solutions in parallel during a specified transition period

- Deploy Google Apps in stages to batches of users

WITH GOOGLE APPS:

- IT infrastructures are lighter, more manageable and more cost-effective

- IT staffs can focus on strategic, value-added initiatives versus delivering commodity tools for email and collaboration

- Employees have access to integrated, productivity-boosting communications and collaboration options from anywhere, at any time

ABOUT GOOGLE APPS

Google Apps is a suite of applications that includes Gmail, Google Calendar (shared calendaring), Google Talk (instant messaging and voice over IP), Google Docs (online document hosting and collaboration), Google Page Creator (web page creation and publishing) and Start Page (a single, customizable access point for all applications). Google Apps offers editions tailored to specific customer needs, including the Premier Edition (businesses of all sizes), Standard Edition (ideal for family domains) and Education Edition (K-12 schools, colleges and universities).

For more information visit
www.google.com/a.

Approaches to transition

After selecting Google Apps, each organization formulated specific strategies to streamline the migration. Some opted for a gradual transition while others made the move to Google Apps almost immediately.

Migrate swiftly

"We migrated in a few quick steps: test, trial, implement and notify users," says BravePoint Systems Manager Ty Higginbotham. "Actual time to set up our Gmail accounts was about an hour." Moving email accounts over from the previous platform took a weekend, because some people wanted to leave email on the old server. Higginbotham says the migration of 100 employee accounts went well, with inadvertently misspelled login passwords being the thorniest issue. Lake View Concrete moved to Google Apps after encountering a database corruption glitch in its previous client/server based system. Recalls Schmidgall, "Instead of wasting time trying to maintain our traditional infrastructure, including a remote site, we gutted our email and calendar systems and moved them to Google Apps. It has been a wonderful experience."

CDI Head Start also made a rapid transition, moving 190 employees from traditional systems to Google Apps. Says Oppenheim, "Our strategy was to flip the switch from one system to the other and instruct people to send email to a new address." Oppenheim changed domain names and imported user accounts into Google Apps, a process he reports took 20 minutes. He then set everyone up with a temporary password and mail-merged accounts into a memo detailing how to log in. A short training session helped employees learn how to use Google Apps. Still, Head Start ran both systems in parallel for 90 days before shutting down the old system. At Theikos, the biggest challenge was user resistance. "There was initial reluctance to move to something new when people were working comfortably with what they had," Masciarelli recalls. "We educated our 70 users on what would be the same, what would be different and what benefits everyone would derive from the switch to Google Apps."

Deploy Google Apps in stages to batches of users

For Prudential Carolina Real Estate, a more gradual transition made sense. Sease set up a user group that worked with Google Apps for 30 days, and then rolled out the new solution to select groups before offering it broadly to everyone. People can choose to switch or not, depending upon their preferences. "About 1,000 sales associates make up the majority of our workforce," says Sease. "The migration path we chose allows us to operate our current system for those that choose to stay on it, and upgrade those that want to use the more advanced features of Google Apps." According to Sease, hundreds of users have already adopted Google Apps.

With Google Apps

IT infrastructures are lighter, more manageable and more cost-effective

Having made the transition, companies are reaping numerous benefits—among them significant cost reductions. With server space freed up that was previously occupied by email and calendaring software, Lake View Concrete was able to install a new ERP system. "We gained back capacity that saved us $8,000 in hardware costs right up front and allowed us to immediately deploy an ERP solution that helps our core business," says Schmidgall. Oppenheim says the positive cost effects for CDI Head Start have been "huge." The organization not only saved money on its networking infrastructure and VPN, but also reduced the need to purchase additional computers, because users can readily share existing resources using Google Apps.

IT staffs can focus on strategic, value-added initiatives versus delivering commodity tools for email and collaboration

IT staffs at the organizations say they are saving time that was previously spent maintaining traditional-style email servers and dealing with spam. "We used to spend hours every week wrestling with spam but that is no longer the case," says Higginbotham. "Google Apps has removed email overhead and eased strain on our IT staff." According to Schmidgall, Google Apps has helped Lake View Concrete reduce IT costs as well by virtually eliminating time and effort required to manage email and calendar systems – gone are the burdens of configuring email clients, archiving data files and other time-consuming tasks required when using server-based email solutions. "Google Apps does it better with more features and less cost in both cash and time," he says. "With Google Apps, we can focus on our core business instead of our IT infrastructure." Adds Oppenheim, "Google Apps makes sense, saves money and works a lot better for us. What's not to love?"

Employees have access to integrated, productivity-boosting communications and collaboration options from anywhere, at any time

Companies have also increased business productivity since making the move to Google Apps. Schmidgall appreciates the fact that Google continually enhances Apps with improvements like increased storage space, innovative Google Docs features and Postini's policy management and spam filtering. Plus, he adds, "collaboration is easy with Google Apps." The companies report that Google Calendar and Docs save time over previous processes for setting appointments and finding and collaborating on documents. At CDI Head Start, documents that were kept on paper and tracked physically have been migrated to Docs for sharing among the responsible parties. Masciarelli explains that Google Apps is helping Theikos attain the goal of creating a "deskless'" model that allows more than 70 users to run in multiple shifts and access their work on any machine at any time. "Google Apps really helps our productivity and our budget. We can get significantly more storage for a lower cost," he says, and notes that Google Apps offers the speed and accessibility needed for Theikos' distributed team to function more productively. At Prudential Carolina Real Estate, "Google Apps provides a mobile communication solution for our sales associates that we cannot match with other products," says Sease.