

Communication no Citywide barrier with mobile Microsoft Exchange

Getting gains from Exchange server messaging and collaboration on the go

SOLUTION SUMMARY:

Name: Citywide Service

Industry: Corporate/government physical asset services

Size: Six staff are using mobile email

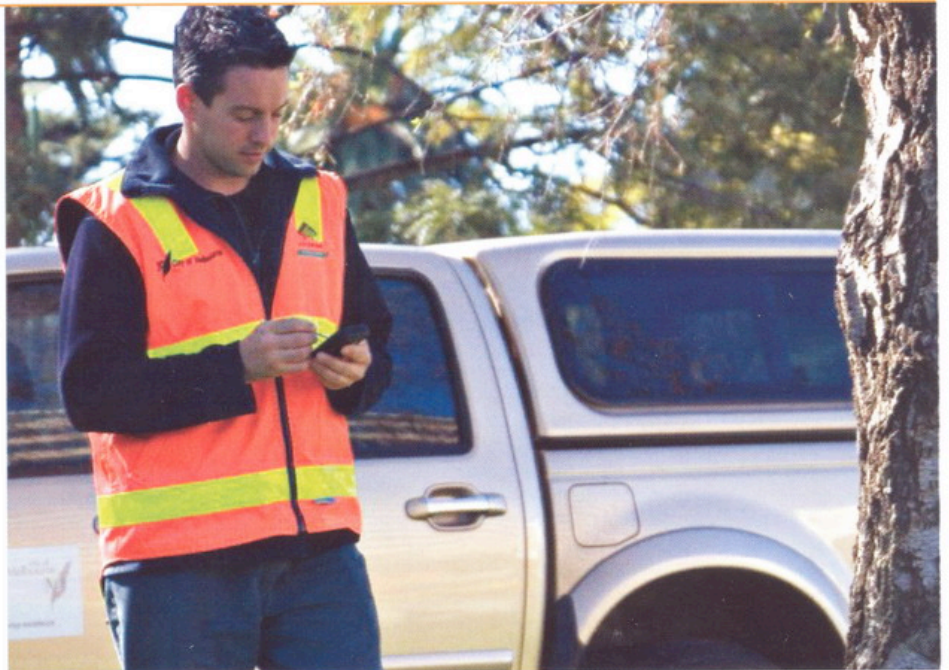
Problem: Many remote workers assigned to far-flung roles, making constant links with the office more tricky and slowing operations down

Solution: Microsoft Exchange upgrade and push-email on PDA devices for sales and field force staff

Cost: About \$2,000

Rollout duration: One day

Results: Faster communication and response times from field to head office and a more connected team, making for happier customers



▲ Citywide staff are staying in touch with head office in real-time on the road

Once Citywide Service was a government-owned enterprise. The contractor has morphed into a 33%-government-owned, mostly private operation where business benefits take priority.

Michael Crask, IT systems manager at Citywide Service, says things have to be a bit more structured now. In the early days, the operation – which provides operational services such as waste management, cleaning, parks and garden maintenance to state and local government – could get by simply by having PCs. Now, it must offer a more enterprise-like solution.

Citywide has staff roaming around from customer to customer, to deliver the services on offer. "We wanted to have a tinker with push email and stuff like that. That offers improved communication with our field forces, which means the bulk of our workers," Crask says.

"Those guys don't come back to the depot every day. They leave home, do a day's work and then come back home. Their office is often their cars," Crask says.

Getting things mobile

Citywide Service uses Microsoft's Dynamic, Great Plains, CRM, Office, Exchange and operating systems in its core IT systems. This year, the company upgraded to Microsoft Exchange 2003.

Exchange's main features are calendar, tasks and email. All useful applications for executives who roam around a bit but must keep up to date. "Some don't come into central headquarters that often and want to be in touch with others and what's going on."

Push email, he says, is easier for such people to manage than taking on a laptop with an EV-DO card or using a business centre.

"We've got a couple of operational people using it, a couple of execs and a couple on the IT team. Then

you've got to meet those demands if you want to get paid. And we like to get paid."

Crask says the setup is proving pretty easy to manage. Little ongoing work is required. "You don't have to go to your Microsoft Exchange Server every day and do things for your normal email to run, and this is no different. You don't need a specialist on site, you don't need another server and so on and so forth," he says.

The system was up and running almost immediately. Citywide Service did get some assistance from local Melbourne reseller Mobilised IT, who came in and gave the company a bit of help starting things off. That took less than a day, and at consulting rates cost "under a couple of thousand", according to Crask.

Because the company already had Exchange licensing and the like, it was just about setting up the server. "They came in the morning and had it working in the afternoon. If you're on the latest version with the latest service pack of Exchange, you're away. And obviously you need Internet access."

Like anything else though, the first person who uses it is likely to suffer the most glitches and that's what Citywide Service experienced. Since then, they haven't had to do anything to it really.

"Admittedly, we've only been using it a couple of months," Crask said. "But once you've got it working, it's working."

Citywide Service is happy with push email and is eyeing a move to mobile CRM using Exchange. "That will probably be the next thing," says Crask.

You don't need a specialist on site, you don't need another server and so on...

we'll probably get another couple of execs, and some members of the management team. It's not going to be low-level field workers."

Crask says it's important to assess your overall, genuine business needs to see if you really need something like push email. Do you really need email everywhere, any time?

"For many staff, an update once a day could be sufficient. Or they're not that mobile or not working on the front line," he says. "If you're an office manager living out of a car half the time and has got to deal with clients. These days, clients are really demanding and