



Customer: Cal Poly Pomona
Web Site: www.csupomona.edu
Customer Size: 2,564 employees
Country or Region: United States
Industry: Education

Customer Profile

Located on more than 1,400 acres in Southern California, Cal Poly Pomona is part of the 23-campus California State University system. The university offers degrees in bachelor's, master's, and certificate programs, and its 2,600 faculty and staff serve nearly 20,000 students. The campus is one of seven polytechnic universities nationwide and is recognized for its learn-by-doing philosophy, blending theory and practice in all its disciplines.

Software and Services

- Services
 - Microsoft Live@edu
 - Microsoft Office Live Workspace
 - Microsoft Outlook Live
 - Windows Live SkyDrive
 - Xbox LIVE

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Reliability Is Up and Administrative Costs Are Down with Hosted Alumni E-Mail Solution

“Providing Live@edu to alumni really distinguishes Cal Poly Pomona from other schools.”

David Drivdahl, Systems Analyst, California State Polytechnic University at Pomona

To address reliability issues, Cal Poly Pomona needed to replace its alumni e-mail forwarding service. The school selected the Microsoft Live@edu hosted communication and collaboration services over Google Apps for Education, largely because of support and scalability concerns. Administration of the Live@edu solution is easier than with the previous solution, and the university is better able to support its alumni community. In the future, Cal Poly Pomona will make the solution available to current students, as well, to enhance collaboration opportunities.

Business Needs

California State Polytechnic University at Pomona, better known as “Cal Poly Pomona,” was founded in 1938 and is located about 30 miles east of downtown Los Angeles. The school educated some 20,000 students in the 2009 academic year.

Like all institutions of higher learning, Cal Poly Pomona works to ensure that students continue to feel connected to the university community long after they graduate. Toward that end, Cal Poly Pomona began in 2006 to offer an e-mail forwarding service for alumni. But after a few years, the service proved to be less than ideal in terms of reliability and support, so university IT leaders considered upgrading the hardware and software on which the service ran. Then

they saw an opportunity to provide a far more powerful solution to alumni and, later, to current students.

According to David Drivdahl, Systems Analyst, California State Polytechnic University at Pomona, the campus was planning for a future move of current students and alumni to an off-site mail solution. This move would convert an existing on-campus solution for use by faculty and staff only. But because of the reliability problems of the alumni forwarding service, Drivdahl and his colleagues decided to establish an off-site solution for alumni right away and move current students to it at a later date.

Solution

For the off-site mail solution, Drivdahl and

his colleagues evaluated Microsoft Live@edu and Google Apps for Education, and selected Live@edu for three reasons. The first was support. "During evaluation, we found the Microsoft people a lot more available for answering our questions," he says. "So we figured that postdeployment support would be stronger as well."

The second factor motivating Drivdahl and his colleagues to select Live@edu was the Windows Live SkyDrive online storage offering that is part of the service. "We needed online storage that can handle files of many different types, some of which can be quite large," he explains. "With Google, there were limitations on file type and size that would have restricted what we wanted to do with the service."

The third factor favoring Live@edu over Google was that among current students who had off-site e-mail accounts for personal use, a greater number were using services based on Microsoft technologies than on Google. "Considering we were planning on moving current students to the new solution anyway, it made sense to offer the messaging environment that they preferred," Drivdahl explains.

When it was time to migrate the accounts of about 1,500 alumni from the forwarding service to Microsoft Outlook Live, the e-mail component of Live@edu, Drivdahl wrote and tested scripts in the Windows PowerShell command-line interface in the Windows Server 2008 operating system. To announce the move, the off-campus organization that manages Cal Poly Pomona alumni affairs distributed e-mail to those 1,500 alumni, and to others who had not yet signed up for the prior service, and found a very positive response.

"Over the first two months, the organization reported a 15 to 20 percent rise in requests for new accounts as compared with the same period the year before," Drivdahl says. "They also reported that based on user feedback, providing Live@edu to alumni really distinguishes Cal Poly Pomona from other schools."

Shortly after the initial announcement, Cal Poly Pomona connected the Live@edu service to its alumni Web portal to simplify account creation and updating. Through the portal, alumni have access to a variety of free services in their Live@edu account, including SkyDrive, Microsoft Office Live Workspace, and Xbox LIVE.

Benefits

Cal Poly Pomona is realizing a number of benefits from having replaced its alumni e-mail forwarding service with a full e-mail solution based on Microsoft Live@edu. Administration is easier, and alumni are enjoying a more reliable e-mail solution, which helps them maintain a stronger connection with the school after graduation. Once the school makes the solution available to current students, it expects to see them benefit academically from the Live@edu collaboration tools.

Simplified Administration

For Drivdahl, reliability is the biggest difference between the alumni e-mail forwarding service and the full e-mail solution based on Live@edu. "In contrast to the instability of the prior solution, in all the time we have used Live@edu we have experienced no reliability problems," he says. "This eliminates the administrative burden of having to periodically restart the system and makes our alumni account holders a lot happier."

Happier alumni are also more involved alumni, according to Janeth Rodriguez, Assistant Director of Alumni Affairs. "Offering a free, reliable e-mail service associated with the university helps us to maintain a relationship with alumni as they go on to postgraduate education and professional life," Rodriguez says. "This strengthens our fundraising efforts and our ranking in the U.S. News & World Report college survey and others, which are based partly on the percentage of graduates who are active in the alumni association."

Strong Sense of Community

Once Cal Poly Pomona makes the Live@edu solution available to current students, the sense of ongoing community will be that much greater. "With all the free services available through Live@edu, students will be able to maintain a communications and working environment for their entire four years here, and then beyond, after they graduate," Drivdahl says. "The community they feel with their fellow Cal Poly Pomona graduates will continue without a break."

Powerful Collaboration

Drivdahl anticipates that while students are still in the university, they will take advantage of the collaboration opportunities available through the Office Live Workspace service of Live@edu. "From time to time, students have tried to use Google and other online applications to support collaboration, but without incurring extra costs to the school, this just hasn't worked," Drivdahl says. "In contrast, with the abundant online storage available free with Office Live Workspace, students will be able to enjoy a collaboration experience that will help them academically."