



Country or Region: United States
Industry: Professional services

Customer Profile

Founded in 1955, HOK is one of the top architecture/engineering/design firms worldwide for commercial and institutional projects. It employs more than 2,600 people.

Business Situation

HOK faced integration challenges with its intranet technology and needed a stronger approach to collaboration for its employees, partners, vendors, and consultants around the world.

Solution

HOK deployed Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2007 to more than 2,600 client systems and Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007 as the foundation of a new intranet.

Benefits

- Stronger mobile and collaboration opportunities
- Faster, easier, more compelling presentations
- IT efficiencies through reduced file size
- Demonstration of technology leadership

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Architecture/Engineering/Design Firm Enhances Collaboration, Reduces IT Costs

“Having 2007 Office on the desktop, along with Office SharePoint Server 2007 as the new foundation of our intranet, provides opportunities for collaboration we could have hardly imagined before.”

Jerry Equi, Regional IT Director, HOK

HOK, one of the top architectural firms in the world, was seeking a better approach to collaboration for its 2,600-plus employees worldwide and the hundreds of partners, vendors, and consultants with whom they work on a daily basis. The firm also wanted desktop productivity tools that would thoroughly integrate into its collaboration solution. HOK decided to convert its intranet from Cold Fusion to Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007, and to migrate its client systems from Microsoft Office 2003 software to the 2007 Office release. As a result, mobile users and others are collaborating more intuitively, especially with shared calendaring and presence awareness, and are creating presentations and worksheets faster. HOK also is enjoying the bandwidth economies of having files that are up to 90 percent smaller than before.

Situation

HOK (formerly Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum) is a global architecture, engineering, planning, interior-design, and consulting firm focused on commercial and institutional projects. Headquartered in St.

Louis, Missouri, with significant operations in San Francisco, California, and New York City, HOK is one of the top design firms in the world, with some of its better-known projects including the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.; Terminal A at



Boston Logan International Airport; and Lavasa Hill Station, a New Urbanism-inspired development near Mumbai, India. HOK also is one of the country's two largest interior-design firms and is active in all major architectural specialties.

HOK is the very definition of a global company. It employs more than 2,600 professionals in seven countries on four continents and collaborates with dozens of partners and vendors worldwide. On any given project, HOK works with many consultants and other businesses, contracted directly or through the customer, all of which work on tight margins and schedules with many time-sensitive deliverables. Through teams that might span multiple HOK offices, the company tackles, on average, more than 1,000 separate projects each year.

Accordingly, more than 40 percent of HOK employees are mobile workers—traveling among HOK offices and project sites, or working after hours from their homes using a remote virtual private network (VPN) connection into the HOK network. Portable computers constitute 40 percent of total client systems at HOK, and Smartphones are deployed extensively as well. For these reasons, the organization wanted a comprehensive and integrated solution that would enable employees to collaborate seamlessly whether they were working remotely or from any HOK office location.

Recently, these factors led to a major rethinking among HOK executives regarding the foundation of the firm's intranet. According to Jerry Equi, a Regional IT Director at HOK, the firm needed an intranet technology that would integrate smoothly with its desktop productivity tools, especially e-mail and calendaring. Coincidentally, the company also was planning the migration of its desktop

productivity solution, Office 2003, which it had used for four years, to the 2007 Office system.

When Equi and his colleagues evaluated Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 for their intranet along with the 2007 Office system for their productivity tools, they recognized that, deployed together, these products could form a solution with the potential for far-reaching advantages. "We liked the comprehensive integration between Office SharePoint Server 2007 and 2007 Office," Equi points out. "We liked having 2007 Office on company computers, as this would provide a single, consistent environment for employees who had already moved to 2007 Office on their home computers. We also had a long history of using Microsoft products, including an Enterprise Agreement that dates back to 1999."

Solution

Because of the complexity of the prior HOK intranet environment, Equi and his colleagues saw that it would be easier, faster, and more efficient to implement the desktop migration first. In mid-2007, they began a pilot deployment of 2007 Office and, soon after, their production deployment. To streamline the process, the deployment team used Microsoft Systems Management Server 2003, the Microsoft Office Compatibility Pack, and Windows® Installer technology.

As Adam Cox, Director of Service Delivery at HOK, explains, the team started out by delivering Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2007 to a selected group of about 10 people at each location, who could act as "champions" at their location. Over a 30-day period, the team gathered feedback from these individuals while simultaneously

providing internally developed "Lunch & Learn" orientations using presentation material provided by Microsoft. Over the course of eight weeks, the deployment team delivered 2007 Office to the company's entire employee base, upgrading more than 2,600 computers in 26 offices worldwide.

According to Equi, the 2007 Office deployment went smoothly, thanks largely to the robust Windows Installer technology. "This is saying a lot, considering how challenging it is to deliver new software to our hundreds of 'road warriors,' who are extremely hard to pin down for these kinds of upgrades," he says.

Next, team members began migrating the company intranet from Cold Fusion to Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 so as to create a central, integrated system for all users to collaborate, share files, and safeguard project details. Subsequently, they deployed Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 to take full advantage of its integration with Office SharePoint Server 2007, including Outlook calendaring, fax and voicemail integration with e-mail, and more.

To help make the deployments even smoother, HOK took extensive advantage of the benefits available through its Microsoft Software Assurance agreement, including Microsoft E-Learning tutorials from MS Learning and home usage rights.

Benefits

Just six months after the original deployment was initiated, HOK executives began reporting advantages resulting from the move to Office SharePoint Server 2007 and 2007 Office. These advantages include powerful new efficiencies in collaboration and an easier and faster approach to creating and delivering compelling

presentations, spreadsheets, and workflow planning schedules. Other advantages include helpful tools that make it easier for employees whose first language is not English to author documents—such as enhanced autocompletion, autocorrection, and spelling and grammar check—and a clear demonstration to HOK customers and shareholders of the firm's ongoing commitment to innovation through technology.

Powerful New Collaboration Capabilities

For HOK employees both outside and inside the United States, collaboration is greatly improved with the deployment of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 and the 2007 Office desktop programs. "Having Office SharePoint Server 2007 as the new foundation of our intranet, along with 2007 Office on the desktop, provides opportunities for collaboration we could have hardly imagined before," Equi says. "This is an enormous advantage considering that a given project can involve the creation, update, and exchange of thousands of PowerPoint, Excel, and Word files among dozens of people."

For example, HOK employees are now taking advantage of shared calendaring between Office SharePoint Server 2007 and the Office Outlook® 2007 messaging client, and incorporating presence awareness into document libraries within their intranet. This means, for example, that an engineer with an urgent question about a CAD drawing posted on the document workspace can know whether the architect is online and can open an instant-message conversation—instead of possibly having to wait for hours or longer to receive an answer to an e-mail or voicemail. But when e-mail makes the most sense, it, too, is becoming a more powerful medium than before. As Equi explains, "Employees are finding it easier to create more content-rich e-

mail messages with the help of enhancements to the formatting and word-processing capabilities of Outlook 2007."

Another collaboration advantage to deploying Office SharePoint Server 2007, Exchange Server 2007, and the 2007 Office programs is the integration of these technologies with Windows Mobile® 6.0, the operating system running on the company's more than 500 Smartphones. "Integrated Microsoft technologies such as Office SharePoint Server 2007, Exchange Server 2007, and 2007 Office, along with Smartphone hardware, are key to the successful support of our mobile workforce," Equi says. "Together these technologies make collaboration easier for our mobile workers and strengthen collaboration overall at HOK."

Rapid Adoption Leading to Greater Productivity

As Cox tells it, the first thing that he and his colleagues noticed about the 2007 Office deployment was how well accepted it was among employees. "We had prepared our IT group to be ready for a big spike in support calls, especially regarding the new user interface, but those calls simply did not come. When we rolled out companywide, we made sure to have IT staff available by phone, email and in-person to address any issues. It turned out that support requests were flat and there was little impact to the business," Cox says. "This is a testament to the effectiveness of our technique of delivering the product initially to champion users, and of our extensive usage of the Lunch & Learn and Microsoft E-Learning opportunities. It also is a testament to the intuitive nature of the Office Fluent user interface, which employees seemed to grasp easily from day one."

The Microsoft Office Fluent™ user interface and SmartArt® graphics in the Microsoft Office PowerPoint® 2007 presentation graphics program and other 2007 Office programs are proving to be productivity boosters for employees. "At HOK, we create more than 4,000 presentations each year, which makes this form of client communication an integral component of the service we deliver," Equi says. "Being able to build these materials easily gives us an enormous advantage, by helping us to use employees' time and talent more efficiently and to deliver these important communications to customers that much sooner."

The Fluent user interface also makes it easier for HOK to build financial models with the Microsoft Office Excel® spreadsheet program. "Recently, we did a cost-comparison financial model, and the creation process was definitely faster," Cox reports. "I easily accessed previously hard-to-find functions like conditional formatting, and the enhanced graphics capabilities made the finished product clearer and more compelling. The same productivity and content enhancements make it easier for us to use Excel for planning and scheduling."

Another enhancement to the 2007 Office software that makes it more intuitive for HOK employees than previous versions is the product's powerful predictive logic, which effectively customizes the product to each individual. "Enhanced autocompletion, autocorrection, and spelling and grammar check are helping all employees work more efficiently," Cox says. "The more powerful spelling- and grammar-check capabilities, in particular, are valued by many of our employees outside the United States for whom English is a second language."

Greater IT Efficiencies

For Equi, the smaller file size available through the Open XML Formats of the 2007 Office system makes it easier and more economical for HOK employees to exchange presentations and other ordinarily sizable documents. “In the past, it was not unusual for employees to exchange presentations of a half gigabyte or larger, thanks to the high-resolution images and diagrams embedded in our files,” Equi explains. “With Open XML, documents are, on average, 90 percent smaller, which means we are using less network bandwidth, less storage space, and less download time. Considering that employees and partners are accessing centrally managed workspaces from all over the world, this helps us reduce IT costs and employee frustration, thereby raising productivity and making collaboration more efficient and more fun.”

Demonstration of Technology Leadership

By enhancing collaboration and boosting productivity, HOK is better poised to pursue innovation, reach new customers, and expand its business from existing customers. Moreover, by making Office SharePoint Server 2007 and 2007 Office the foundation of its collaboration strategy, HOK is also conveying its technology leadership to competitors, customers, and future employees.

Further demonstrating its forward-looking vision, HOK is now evaluating Microsoft Photosynth™ technology and the Microsoft Surface™ software and touch computing platform, two products designed to help geographically distributed users view and interact with visual images in a richer and more intuitive way. In addition, the firm has completed an upgrade from Microsoft Systems Management Server 2003 to Microsoft System Center Configuration Manager 2007 and is planning to upgrade

from the Windows Server® 2003 operating system to Windows Server 2008 and from the Windows XP desktop operating system to Windows Vista®.

“We are looking beyond collaboration into a very comprehensive approach to knowledge management,” Equi says. “It’s all part of our commitment to use advanced information technologies as a market differentiator—and with Office SharePoint Server 2007 and 2007 Office, we are off to an excellent start.”