



**Customer:** Northern Kentucky University  
**Web Site:** [www.nku.edu](http://www.nku.edu)  
**Customer Size:** 5,000 employees  
**Country or Region:** United States  
**Industry:** Education

#### Customer Profile

Northern Kentucky University is a four-year, fully accredited public institution that was founded in 1968 and is located in Highland Heights, Kentucky. The university serves more than 15,000 full-time students.

#### Software and Services

- Services
  - Microsoft Live@edu
  - Microsoft Office Live Workspace
  - Microsoft Office Outlook Live
  - Windows Live Alerts
  - Windows Live Messenger
  - Windows Live SkyDrive
- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
  - Microsoft Identify Lifecycle Manager 2007

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## University Supports Learner-Focused Education with Hosted Student Email

**“We are offering a rich and robust email solution that, were it hosted internally, would cost us at least \$200,000 more per year.”**

*Tim Ferguson, Chief Information Officer, Northern Kentucky University*

Northern Kentucky University wanted to address students' email storage challenges without incurring the cost of expanding an existing onsite solution. The university switched to Microsoft Live@edu hosted communication and collaboration services, which it has found to be highly cost-effective to deploy and support. Now, students are enjoying vastly increased storage for email messages and an easier approach to group projects.

#### Business Needs

Northern Kentucky University (NKU) is a four-year, fully accredited public institution that serves more than 15,000 full-time students from 43 states and 56 countries. So that NKU can offer students what it calls “a private school education for a fraction of the cost,” the university is strongly committed to smaller class sizes (24 students on average) and a smaller student-to-faculty ratio (14:1) than most other public institutions of higher learning. This is part of an academic culture that emphasizes a learner-focused approach to education, supported by the strategic application of information technology.

In the mid-2000s, NKU began providing email services for students, faculty, and staff through a solution based on

Microsoft Exchange Server. The solution served its intended purpose, but changes in the way it was being used soon led the university to consider another approach.

For one thing, the average size of an email message was growing dramatically as it became common for instructors to attach slide shows and other large documents to their messages to students. As a result, explains Douglas Wells, Associate Director of Information Technology at Northern Kentucky University, many students rapidly exceeded their storage quotas on the school's server hardware, which required them to have another email account elsewhere.

“To maintain access to their email messages, at least 20 percent of students

had to forward messages to other email services, with all the inconsistency that practice entails," Wells says. "We considered increasing storage quotas but were reluctant because of the cost of purchasing and supporting additional hardware."

Another challenge stemmed from the rapid growth in mobile computing. "As the university sought ways to better integrate mobile calendaring and shared workspaces in the classroom, we wanted an email solution that could fully support mobile technology without requiring a lot of hands-on work," Wells says. "We also wanted to ensure that students could access email through a variety of browsers, on mobile and non-mobile devices alike."

## Solution

Because the storage challenge was fundamental, Wells and his colleagues wanted an email solution that would be hosted offsite. They evaluated Google Apps for Education and Microsoft Live@edu hosted communication and collaboration services before selecting the latter. According to Wells, the team chose Live@edu for two main reasons.

"We wanted comprehensive support for moving an enterprise service like email to the cloud, and considered the support available through Microsoft to be stronger than what was available through Google," Wells says. "We also wanted a solution that would be familiar to first-year students, and Live@edu was that service, because the State of Kentucky was at the time moving toward bringing it into grades K-12."

Wells and his colleagues launched the Live@edu project in mid-2009 and had set up more than 20,000 student accounts by the end of the calendar year—ready for students when they returned from the mid-

school-year break. The team used Outlook Live Directory Sync with Microsoft Identity Lifecycle Manager 2007 to provide a unified global address list so that email communications between faculty members (who are still on the Exchange-based solution) and students appear to be coming from the same system. The team also used Outlook Live Email Migration to migrate students' existing email, and the Exchange ActiveSync technology in Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 to ensure that students could access the service from any of the more than 15 different mobile devices commonly used on campus.

## Benefits

Through this deployment of Live@edu—which includes Microsoft Outlook Live, Windows Live SkyDrive, Microsoft Office Live Workspace, Windows Live Messenger, and Windows Live Alerts—Northern Kentucky University is achieving a number of solid benefits. Students have more storage for email communications and a convenient way of collaborating, and the university is enjoying cost-effective deployment and support.

### Easier Communication and Collaboration

For Wells, the most dramatic benefit of the Live@edu deployment is the expansion of student mailbox capacity. "Storage has grown from 50 megabytes to 10 gigabytes per account, which means that students no longer need to forward their email messages to other email services," he reports. "Students are thanking me left and right, now that they can have all their messages easily accessible through one account."

Students also can access their email from any PC or mobile device, and collaborate easily through Office Live Workspace.

"Now, students can access shared documents through virtually any PC, mobile device, or browser, and they no longer have to carry files around on flash drives," Wells says.

### A Highly Cost-Effective Solution

Wells points out that students have been able to take advantage of these benefits with little assistance from IT staff. "Just by clicking around, students are finding more ways they can benefit from Live@edu than we even advertised," he says. "Moreover, the user interface and sign-in process are so close to the students' earlier Exchange-based solution that we didn't have to incur any training costs."

For Tim Ferguson, Chief Information Officer at Northern Kentucky University, an email solution that helps students communicate with faculty and collaborate with one another is a powerful demonstration of the school's use of information technology to further its learner-focused educational philosophy.

The solution also happens to provide a significant cost advantage. "We deployed Live@edu for a fraction of what it would have cost us to deploy an on-site solution, considering the additional hardware that would require; and maintenance costs are lower, too," Ferguson says. "As a result, we are offering a rich and robust email solution that, were it hosted internally, would cost us at least \$200,000 more per year."

In future plans, the university will deploy Microsoft Office Communications Server 2008 R2 by the start of the 2010 school year, and will move faculty and staff members to Live@edu by the start of the 2012 school year.