



Collaboration Tools Teach Business Students the Practice and Power of Global Teamwork

Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Higher education

Customer Profile

The Eugene M. Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts – Amherst registered some 3,300 students in 2006–2007. The institution employs 94 full-time faculty members and 42 administrative staff.

Business Situation

To help prepare students to work in a globalized collaborative environment, the Isenberg School established a multicampus project, but a reliance on e-mail stymied productivity.

Solution

The Isenberg School, which has 650 PCs installed for use by faculty and staff and in student labs, deployed Microsoft® Office Groove® 2007 and other components of the 2007 Microsoft Office suites.

Benefits

- Productive collaborative environment with enhanced security
- Powerful synchronization between online and offline work
- Integration among multiple technologies
- Ease of use, deployment, and support

“In disciplines ranging from liberal arts to business, engineering to nursing, Office Groove 2007 can play a role in helping students meet academic objectives and prepare for their professional futures.”

Gino Sorcinelli, Professor of Accounting Information Systems

In a project designed to teach business students about collaboration, the Eugene M. Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts - Amherst had powerful software tools at its disposal. But reliance on e-mail for communications and file sharing stalled the project when a newly installed server misrouted students' messages for several days. In response, project leaders implemented a process using Microsoft® Office Groove® 2007 so that students could collaborate without having to rely on e-mail. As a result of this and of the product's ease of use and deployment, powerful synchronization capabilities, and integration with Office SharePoint® Server 2007, students are well on track to meet all project objectives and better prepare themselves to work successfully within global teams once they enter the workforce.

“Because all Office Groove 2007 correspondence goes through dedicated relay servers, we could do away with e-mail for file sharing or online communication among the four campuses in the Consortium.”

Gino Sorcinelli, Professor of Accounting Information Systems

Figure 1. The Office Groove workstation is easily customized to create a unique environment for the Consortium project.

Situation

At the Eugene M. Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts - Amherst, students have long been taught the lessons of teamwork in building business-leadership skills. With globalization, those lessons are more vital than ever, as student teams, working in courses from marketing to finance to manufacturing operations, now comprise individuals from multiple campuses, continents, and cultures.

Also vital are the technologies designed to simplify the processes that drive such teamwork. For this reason, the Isenberg School has always been an enthusiastic promoter of technologies that support collaboration.

For example, the school standardized on Microsoft® Office in 1994 and pursued an innovative deployment of Microsoft SharePoint® Portal Server starting in 1999 as a portal for library access and textbook resources and a repository for institutional

knowledge. More recently, the school implemented a sophisticated video-conferencing solution based on the ConferenceXP research platform, an initiative of Microsoft Research, to support a pioneering project known as the Consortium.

Within the Consortium, a total of 25 students and 7 faculty members from the Isenberg School, Bentley College, the University of Ulster, and the National University of Ireland work in teams on development of several virtual software-based products.

From the beginning, Consortium members used ConferenceXP for a weekly virtual meeting to assign and discuss tasks to be accomplished by individuals or teams within the larger project. Between meetings the students relied on e-mail for communication and sharing of files, and then posted those files in their final form to an Office SharePoint Server 2007 site.

But not long into the project, students began to notice that some deliverables from fellow project members never seemed to arrive. Others noticed that e-mails were going unanswered for days. Finally, school administrators discovered the source of problem: A new e-mail server had been inadvertently installed without an IP name, so that e-mail traffic through it was treated by receiving systems as spam.

Solution

This event led Consortium leaders to seek an alternative approach. According to Gino Sorcinelli, Professor of Accounting Information Systems, they briefly considered several course-management solutions, but found none that were powerful enough. They also considered using the collaboration support in Office SharePoint Server 2007 as a way to support a virtual-workspace environment required by Consortium members.



“Whenever and wherever a student accesses his or her Office Groove 2007 workspace, all document updates since the last access are automatically synchronized.”

Gino Sorcinelli, Professor of Accounting Information Systems

“But what we really needed, with team members as widely dispersed as ours, was a solution designed specifically for interaction across firewalls,” Sorcinelli says. And that, he adds, led him and his colleagues to a serious evaluation of Microsoft Office Groove® 2007.

“We had been thinking of using the technology on which Office Groove 2007 is based even before it became part of the Microsoft Office product family, because of the compatibility of that technology with Windows® SharePoint Services,” Sorcinelli explains. “Moreover, we understood that because all Office Groove 2007 correspondence goes through dedicated relay servers, we could do away with e-mail for file sharing or online communication among the four campuses in the Consortium. So, when the Groove technology became part of the 2007 Microsoft Office suites, we saw it as an ideal solution.”

According to Sorcinelli, Office Groove 2007 was deployed to Consortium members in late 2006 and will be used on that project until its completion, targeted for mid-2007.

Benefits

For Sorcinelli, the deployment of Office Groove 2007 into the Consortium is beneficial on several fronts. It is freeing Consortium members from having to rely on e-mail for communication and file sharing. It is demonstrating the advantages of giving students a virtually seamless collaboration solution, which includes the Microsoft Office OneNote® 2007 note-taking program, Office SharePoint® Server 2007, and other components of Microsoft Office Enterprise 2007. It also is providing Sorcinelli and his colleagues a preview of Office Groove 2007 in preparation for a large-scale deployment at the Isenberg School and the other three Consortium campuses in early 2007.

Scaling Firewalls with Enhanced Security

As Sorcinelli emphasizes, by enabling students to communicate and share files without having to use e-mail, Office Groove 2007 helps keep individual and team productivity high. “With Office Groove 2007, there is virtually no chance of a communications downtime as we experienced with the unnamed mail server,” he says. “That alone makes Office Groove 2007 shine.”

At the same time, Sorcinelli is more than comfortable with the security provided by the relay servers that Office Groove 2007 uses for mail messages, instant messages, online discussions, and file sharing. “With Office Groove 2007, the students and faculty enjoy the protection of data-encryption standards that are used by the U.S. military,” he says. “For this reason, we consider Office Groove 2007 a very secure online workspace.” Synchronizing Communications and Work

Another productivity enhancer is the synchronization capability of Office Groove 2007. “Whenever and wherever a student accesses his or her Office Groove 2007 workspace, all document updates since the last access are automatically synchronized,” Sorcinelli explains. “This includes documents from that student’s own PC and campus intranet as well as from the respective PCs and campus intranets of all other Consortium members.”

Sorcinelli adds that the synchronized updates are made not just to Microsoft Office documents but also to online discussions, calendars, schedules, and so on. “With this level of synchronized collaboration—as well as the product’s support for transparent movement between online and offline work—Office Groove 2007 plays a big role in helping students integrate content and streamline processes such as document review and version control,” he says.

“We have always wanted to strengthen collaboration on student projects. Now, with Office Groove 2007 and the drivers, tools, and solid foundation that it provides for virtual collaboration within an educational framework, we can.”

Gino Sorcinelli, Professor of Accounting Information Systems

Sorcinelli especially likes the support in Office Groove 2007 for specifying priority roles inside the workspace, a feature that also can help simplify document review and version control. In addition, he applauds the “alert” functionality that keeps students informed of which team members are in the workspace at any given time.

“The alert functionality was there before, but in this version of the product it is greatly enhanced,” Sorcinelli says. “This is a huge advantage.”

Applying Comprehensive Integration

For all that he likes about Office Groove 2007, Sorcinelli is careful to point out that it is just one of the 2007 Microsoft Office system technologies that support productivity and collaboration within the Consortium. For this reason he speaks highly of the thorough integration of Office Groove 2007 with Office SharePoint Server 2007 and other components of the 2007 Microsoft Office suites, and of the integration of those products with ConferenceXP.

For example, using the Office OneNote 2007 presentation mode, the students deliver slides created with the Microsoft Office PowerPoint® 2007 presentation graphics program during their ConferenceXP meetings as if each slide was a page in Office OneNote 2007. “It’s very slick and one reason we like Tablet PCs in this environment, which enable students to annotate a presentation with a stylus,” Sorcinelli says.

If Office OneNote 2007 represents the tool that supports the “front end” of the assignments that students share in the Office Groove 2007 workspace, Office SharePoint Server 2007 represents the tool that supports the “back end” of those assignments: the repository into which the final results are published. For this reason, Sorcinelli explains, the integration between

Office Groove 2007 and Office SharePoint Server 2007 is essential.

“When students are ready to publish the results of their research, they will use the new Office Groove 2007 SharePoint Files tool to synchronize files from Office Groove 2007 with SharePoint document libraries,” Sorcinelli says.

Office SharePoint Server 2007 also provides powerful capabilities outside of its integration with Office Groove 2007, according to Sorcinelli. For example, content-storage enhancements make Office SharePoint Server 2007 a solid and easily searchable archiving solution. “If students want to archive research materials, they can use Office SharePoint Server 2007 to store and index them automatically,” he reports. “We also like that SharePoint lists and libraries now provide per-item security for better data control and integrity, a recycle bin, and enhanced flexibility for storing more types of content.”

Finally, for all its advantages in the academic setting, Office Groove 2007 can also be a powerful tool in the university’s administrative realm. “Because Office Groove 2007 supports communications and file sharing outside the traditional e-mail environment, it can help educational institutions free up university servers and potentially reduce related IT costs,” Sorcinelli says.

Envisioning Future Deployments

Halfway into the Consortium project, Sorcinelli and his colleagues will expand the deployment of Office Groove 2007 to reach some 1,000 students and faculty members distributed among the four campuses that are part of the project. Depending on the degree of success enjoyed with the Consortium, Sorcinelli’s team also will deploy

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to: www.microsoft.com

For more information about the Eugene M. Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts - Amherst, visit the Web site at: www.som.umass.edu

Office Groove 2007 to other schools within the University of Massachusetts system.

Sorcinelli says it's not only the functionality but also the flexibility of Office Groove 2007 that makes it an ideal fit in almost any setting.

"Even the tools available to the user can be customized with Office Groove 2007 InfoPath® forms, so users can set up workspaces unique to their environment and application," Sorcinelli points out. "This means that in disciplines ranging from liberal arts to business, engineering to nursing, Office Groove 2007 can play a role in helping students meet academic objectives and prepare for their professional futures."

Whatever future deployments occur at the Isenberg School and beyond, Sorcinelli is satisfied with his experience thus far with Office Groove 2007. "We have always wanted to strengthen collaboration on student projects," he says. "Now, with Office Groove 2007 and the drivers, tools, and solid foundation that it provides for virtual collaboration within an educational framework, we can."

Microsoft Office System

The Microsoft Office System is the business world's chosen environment for information work, providing the programs, servers, and services that help you succeed by transforming information into impact.

For more information about the Microsoft Office System, go to: www.microsoft.com/office

Software and Services

- 2007 Microsoft Office System
 - Office Groove 2007
 - Office SharePoint Server 2007
- Office OneNote 2007

■ Microsoft Conference XP