

Australian Rugby Union centralises IT network, improves collaboration between staff and players

Australian Rugby Union

industry:

Sport and Recreation

country:

Australia

business challenge:

Deploy a centralised IT infrastructure to encourage better information sharing and reduced duplication in effort and costs

solution:

A new wide area network and hosted service used to run websites, player registration and competition management systems. A shared messaging and unified communications environment

services:

- Microsoft Active Directory and Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 infrastructure design and implementation services
- Deployment and integration services for Microsoft OCS R2 with TANDBERG video conferencing

results:

- Improved communication between staff, referees and players across the member network
- Enabled remote staff to access the network from any location, ensuring they can view email and any documents they require
- Allowed the organisation to make better use of server resources by eliminating the need to use third-party suppliers at each location
- Reduced the number of support incidents by 30 per cent by removing the complexity associated with setting up VPN connections
- Enabled remote users to make calls in areas where broadband speed is poor

Executive Summary

In October 2008, Australian Rugby Union Ltd (ARU) engaged Dimension Data to **assist in the deployment of a new centralised IT environment** based on Microsoft Active Directory, Microsoft Exchange 2007 and Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2.

These solutions are provided under a shared services agreement, which has improved communication and collaboration between the ARU and its member unions with the deployment of a standard infrastructure. This has enabled users, particularly remote staff, to share information easily.

Client Overview

Australian Rugby Union (ARU) Ltd is a Sydney-based non-profit organisation charged with managing the game of rugby union in Australia. The national body provides development officers, player registration, coaching courses, referee accreditation, websites and other services to seven national rugby teams and community-based clubs, which are affiliated through member unions in each Australian state and territory.

Business Challenge

In 2007, the ARU undertook a review of its operations and determined that member unions could benefit from the deployment of new centralised IT infrastructure delivered under a shared services arrangement.

Each member union within the network prides itself on being independent, which meant that each organisation had its own IT infrastructure. This resulted in duplication of software licences and no control over hardware purchasing.

“Each member union would go off and purchase their own IT equipment; we had nine different email servers and nine different Microsoft Exchange licences,”

said Paul Templeman, Head of Online Business & IT Services, at the Australian Rugby Union.

“There is a lot of document sharing among the group and we ended up with everything being sent via email with no centralised management. Staff were not able to plug into the network at each office and access key resources such as match schedules, and information such as player performance, physical testing and medical data.”

Solution Delivered

In October 2008, the ARU engaged Dimension Data to assist in the selection of a new wide area network (WAN) and hosting service for the organisation's websites, player registration, and competition management systems, under the first phase of the consolidation project.

Under the second phase, Dimension Data was asked to implement a shared messaging and unified communications environment. This was based on Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2, Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 with unified messaging, Microsoft Active Directory and Microsoft Outlook Web Access, comprising presence, instant messaging, voice and video conferencing technologies.

Dimension Data also partnered with Microsoft and several other manufacturers to help fund a large component of this project under the Microsoft Lighthouse Program Business Investment Fund.

After a rigorous selection process that included guidance from Dimension Data specialists, the ARU selected Macquarie Telecom to host WAN infrastructure that runs ARU websites, player registration and competition management systems.

"Around 15 web servers are being hosted and we have added a private IP network between the ARU and various member unions that run the Super 14 competition," said Templeman "These companies were not connected to the same network previously."

The implementation of Microsoft Active Directory and Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 has provided the ARU with standardised identity management and resource authorisation across the group.

"Everyone is now using the same platform with centralised address books and file sharing," said Paul Templeman

The deployment of Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2 (OCS) has enabled ARU's remote users to make and receive calls and faxes anywhere in the world using a broadband connection. This allows players and coaching staff to easily communicate with each other, particularly when they are abroad. The system offers 'presence' capabilities, which allows staff to view each other's phone status.

How We Delivered

Dimension Data's consulting practice ran the tender process for the selection of a new WAN and hosting service on behalf of the ARU. Consultants helped the organisation evaluate five submissions from telecommunications and hosting providers, devise a shortlist of tenderers and reach a decision.

"The consultants had come from the telecommunications industry and had a great deal of experience assisting with similar types of tenders so they knew which aspects of the contract were negotiable," said Templeman

"They also gave us advice on what questions we needed to ask the vendors. Having Dimension Data on board was extremely useful because it also took away much of the vendor bias during the selection process. When you see a sales representative's face drop when they walk in the door because they see two consultants that they already know, it's a pretty good sign."

As a result, the ARU was armed with the right tools to question each vendor's 'cookie cutter' approach to ensure the solution met the organisation's exact requirements.

Dimension Data designed and implemented the standard Microsoft Active Directory and Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 infrastructure at ARU's headquarters in St Leonards, Sydney. Dimension Data engineers then trained the ARU's IT staff so they could complete the rollout across the member union network. The solution includes an 'edge server' which provides remote users with network access without a virtual private network (VPN).

"It was important to give each union access to the network as if it was at our head office," said Templeman

"They no longer have to worry about waiting for documents to be sent via email; they can simply log on to the internet and get access to any document that they require."

Dimension Data also provided an engineer to assist with the deployment of Microsoft OCS R2.

"The engineer integrated our TANDBERG video conferencing unit into the OCS environment," said Templeman. "The breadth of Dimension Data's service offering in that area really made the difference. If you don't have someone providing expertise across those areas, you get people playing the blame game. We don't have that problem; we are dealing with a single organisation with one account manager to call to get issues resolved efficiently."

Value Derived

The consolidated infrastructure has improved communication between staff and players across the entire organisation.

"The point of the exercise wasn't necessarily to save money, it was to enable better collaboration between everyone," said Templeman

Today, ARU and member union remote staff, including doctors, team managers, players and referees, can take their laptop to any office or hotel room with an internet connection and work as if they were in the head office.

"The complexity of connection to a VPN has been completely removed," said Templeman

"This has reduced the number of IT support incidents across the ARU and member union organisations by 30 per cent, which has freed up our IT staff to do other things."

The ARU's OCS implementation was tested during the Qantas Wallabies' 2009 tour of South Africa for the Bundaberg Rum Tri Nations series.

"South Africa's broadband network capacity is quite poor and during the tour, there was a network issue across the country, which resulted in internet performance being even worse," said Templeman

Despite the slow performance, remote users were still able to successfully receive and make calls due to the adaptive VoIP codecs technology used in Microsoft OCS R2. This feature adjusts to the capability of a broadband network by increasing or decreasing the call load based on the available bandwidth, reducing the risk of call drop outs.

“When the Qantas Wallabies are on tour, they set up their laptops and use the IP voice functionality inside Microsoft OCS to make and receive phone calls and get their voicemail messages,” said Templeman “It’s a really solid platform for us.”

The new hosted WAN infrastructure has also enabled the ARU to make better use of its existing server resources. Previously, if a union member site had a server issue, they would have to pay a third-party supplier to fix the problem.

“In one particular case, one of our member sites in Western Australia had a server problem and because we are connected to the same WAN, we

utilised staff from our head office to help them rebuild the server and get it working again,” said Templeman

The ARU will look to take advantage of email archiving capabilities in Microsoft Exchange 2010 when it becomes available in the first half of 2010. This would reduce the ARU’s infrastructure costs by removing the need to use third-party email archiving tools.

The forthcoming Microsoft Office Communications Server 2010 will also allow the organisation to route calls over its WAN rather than the public telephone network, which will eliminate STD phone charges and reduce call costs.