

WA Department of Education relies on Office 365 to provide emails for all public school students

Department of Education, Western Australia

industry:

Education

country:

Australia

business challenge:

To provide secure and age-appropriate email services for all kindergarten to Year 12 students with automated provisioning, integration with administration systems and shared password sign-on.

solution:

Office 365 hosted email service for up to 350,000 students integrated with in-house student administration systems.

results:

- Automated provisioning.
- Large (25GB) mailboxes at no cost provided by Office 365 For Education Program.
- Greatly improved email experience resulting in increased uptake.
- Direct access to email from school portal.
- First implementation of Office 365 solution for K-12 education institution in Australia.

Executive Summary

The WA Department of Education needed to **migrate its in-house email service** for students to a new system integrated with Oracle Collaboration Suite, used extensively for administration purposes. Dimension Data leveraged the extensibility of **Microsoft Forefront Identity Manager (FIM 2010 R2)**, the PowerShell scripting language and the Extensible Connectivity Management Agent to develop and demonstrate, within two weeks, a solution to integrate Oracle Collaboration Suite with Microsoft Office 365. It has now been **rolled out to several hundred schools** and is serving thousands of students.

Client Overview

The Department of Education provides high quality education for children and young people throughout Western Australia. It operates 770 schools with some 265,000 students. With over 33,000 full-time equivalent staff, it is the largest employer in the state.

Business Challenge

The Department needed to migrate an existing in-house email service for students based on the Oracle Collaboration Suite that was nearing end of life and that had been poorly accepted by schools to a new system able to integrate with Oracle Collaboration Suite, which is used extensively by the Department for administration purposes.

A pilot of Microsoft Live@Edu had to be abandoned because it provided access to social media sites, making it unsuitable for use by young children. To replace it Microsoft offered the Department early access to Office 365 and recommended Dimension Data to provide an implementation service because of Dimension Data's experience gained from implementing Live@Edu at other education sites.

A major challenge facing the Dimension Data team was the need to integrate Office 365 with Oracle Collaboration Suite, the primary repository of all data on student and staff, so as to enable automatic creation of email addresses when students are added to the system and to provide single password sign-on so that users could log into their school's web portal and then with one click gain access to their email.

Solution Delivered

Dimensional Data leveraged the extensibility of Microsoft Forefront Identity Manager (FIM 2010 R2), the PowerShell task-based command line shell scripting language and the Extensible Connectivity Management Agent (ECMA 2) to build a multi-threaded Management Agent for Office 365. The challenge to provision 350,000 students into a cloud services inspired the development team to design the multi-threaded agent to cater for the volume. This increased the provisioning rate from 7,500 per day to 50,000 per day.

The FIM 2010 solution was able to extract the user information from Oracle Collaboration Suite and provisioned all students into Office 365 using the Dimension Data Cloud Identity Management PowerShell Management Agent (CIM) to enable the Department to

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Tim Yorke, Director Strategic Service Delivery, Department of Education, Western Australia

provide email services to every student in WA's public schools. The Cloud Identity Management PowerShell Management Agent (CIM) manages users as part of the Microsoft Online component of Office 365 and also controls the licensing of users for various Office 365 components.

Dimension Data Practice Manager, Jaen Snyman, said: “Microsoft's toolset at the time was only available to do synchronisation from Active Directory to Office 365. Without our solution, the Department would have had to manually import and modify student data to get it into Office 365.”

He added: “Education has different requirements from enterprises. There are very many groups and many different classrooms each with its own manager. We had to cater for that environment. We had set up many distribution groups so that people could, for example, send emails to only one class if they want to.”

Dimension Data was able to demonstrate its solution to the Department after only two weeks of development and to demonstrate that FIM 2010 R2 was the ideal identity management solution. As a result the Department opted for Office 365 without going to the market for possible alternatives.

Snyman said: “The ease which we used ECMA as an extensible development platform showed that if the Department wants to do anything additional at a later stage, that won't require a major rework.”

Benefits gained from the solution include:

- Large mailboxes (25GB limits) at no cost as part of the Office 365 for education program.
- Much better user experience and take-up by students of all ages.
- Automated provisioning and very little management overhead.

- Office 365 provides the security and reliability required by the Department for its email service.

Value Derived

Tim Yorke Director, Strategy Service Delivery in the Department of Education, said: “Dimension Data came in and worked with our in house technical people to design a system that would provide the outcome we wanted and then put that service in place. They designed the interface between the different applications, tested them and then actioned the provisioning for all students.”

Yorke explained: “We needed an engine that would take the student data from Oracle Collaboration Suite and provision it into an Office 365 account so that as a student enrolls an automated process kicks off and produces an email account in Office 365 for the student that is linked back through our tools that identify students and verify their access. This means that when they log on to our portal their identification details are passed between our system and Office 365 so the student is verified and can access their email.”

The Department's policy is to devolve decision-making to individual schools so each school must decide if it wants its students to have email. However mailboxes have been provisioned for all 265,000 students in the Department's 770 schools and these mailboxes will be synchronised with the register of enrolled students.

“Whether the school intends to use email or not, an account has been provisioned for all students. The provisioning module that Dimension Data worked on with us keeps that provisioning up to date as students come and go,” Yorke said.

The solution developed by Dimension Data also ensures that students have just one password for the school's web portal and their Office 365 email account. “To get into their Office 365 account they come to our portal, log in with their password and see a button for email, click on that and their Office 365 email opens,” Yorke said. “It's a seamless process.”

Yorke concluded: “Dimension Data have been great. They have been very responsive, they have come in, listened to our needs, made suggestions and worked closely with our enterprise architects and worked quickly and diligently to come up with a solution that fits our business needs.”

He added: “In WA Dimension Data is the company that has the most experience in implementing Live@Edu, and now Education 365. They have done this for a number of the universities, and for the TAFE colleges. However this is the first time they have done it for an education institution that caters for kindergarten. We have the additional complication of having to protect young children from harm.”

The new system went live with a limited number of schools at the start of the 2013 school year. In the second term some 200 schools were cut over from the old system and more schools will be added as they request email services.

Now the Department is looking at additional features to enhance the system. “Dimension Data is now designing the capability for teachers to look into the mailboxes of all students,” Yorke said. “There is degree of comfort and safety that comes from that. We call that the duty of care component.”