

Southern Cross University enhances learning and improves client experience with cloud messaging



Challenge

Southern Cross University had a need to provide a messaging system that would not only meet the expectations and needs of staff and students but also improve productivity and enhance learning through better collaboration.



Solution

In collaboration with SCU, Dimension Data designed a cloud computing solution utilising Microsoft Office 365™ for the university's messaging platform. A co-existence model that provided for the running of parallel email systems allowed for a smooth migration process with little impact on the staff and students.



Result

- Significantly improved email service for students and staff
- Highly available email infrastructure
- Significantly reduced costs for maintaining email infrastructure
- University staff and students have the ability to work anytime anywhere on any device
- Greater collaboration between staff, campuses and students
- A Microsoft cloud roadmap

“... we are now providing a **significantly improved email** service to staff and students at the university and **meeting their expectations** in terms of functionality.”

Tim Lane,

Project Manager,

Southern Cross University

 Challenge

Delivering the tools for communication and collaboration

Southern Cross University (SCU) is an Australian public university committed to innovative teaching and research. Its teaching focus is in the traditional areas of Arts, Sciences, Business and Law but also covers the areas of nursing, education, environment, tourism and hospitality. In addition, the university has a strong research focus in sciences such as environmental, plant genetics, and geosciences.

SCU's three main campuses are located at Lismore and Coffs Harbour in New South Wales and also on the Gold Coast, Queensland. It has over 16,000 students and 2,000 staff, including international students and those undertaking distance and online education.

With a large and diverse student and staff population, communication and collaboration are vital components of the learning and teaching experience at SCU. Providing the tools to support, enhance and encourage communication and collaboration is therefore central to the role of the Technology Services division of the university.

Email, in particular, forms an essential part of the education process at SCU. Students use it to communicate with their peers and submit their assignments, while teachers and administration staff use it to distribute information to students across the university's campuses.

SCU had an ageing and legacy Sun email system that had limited functionality and presented risk to the university in the form of significant cost to upgrade, a lack of skilled resources available to maintain any new infrastructure and an inability to meet the university's requirements for seamless collaboration. In order to continue to deliver the desired level of service to students and staff, as well as provide the advantages available with other messaging platforms (including seamless collaboration and meeting scheduling), the Technology Services division acknowledged that it needed to update the university's email system.

Recognising that it would have been very expensive to upgrade its existing messaging platform and that Technology Services would not be able to deliver a new platform with its existing resources (at least not for the same effort), SCU decided to replace its existing email and calendaring system with a Microsoft Office 365™ cloud subscription service. This allowed the university to get the latest in Microsoft technology, without having to take care of it themselves. SCU also decided to standardise its Windows® Desktops to Windows 7®, Office 2010® and Microsoft Outlook®.

The project, championed by SCU's Executive Team, was underpinned by clearly identified key business drivers. One of the main drivers for moving email to the cloud was service improvement – including functionality, capacity, security, availability and manageability. The focus on delivering the project as a service improvement resulted in enhanced collaboration and productivity value for all students and staff.

 Solution

Business as usual

With an existing relationship built on the success of several projects, including SCU's migration off Novell and onto a Microsoft platform, Dimension Data conducted a Cloud Messaging Technical Feasibility report for SCU. On the basis of this report, the university decided to move to Office 365 as its messaging platform with a view to utilising other services, such as SharePoint, in the future.

SCU partnered with Dimension Data to design and implement an email "co-existence" model. The team developed a migration plan that catered for co-existence of email systems, speed of mail migration, and desktop preparation and gave SCU the flexibility to migrate at its own pace.

Commencing in 2012, the project had a main goal to provide a messaging platform for its entire student and staff population, with easy access both within and external to the university campus. It was important that during this period, staff and students would not be disrupted and could continue to collaborate throughout the activity.

SCU took a migration approach that had little impact on its users and that was flexible enough to be delivered as part of the desktop roll out. By using an on-premise Exchange 2010 infrastructure as the platform for stepping to Office 365, SCU had the flexibility it needed to migrate users in groups, reduce risk, and troubleshoot data migration issues more efficiently.

The infrastructure consisted of an Exchange 2010 hybrid design with highly available mailbox servers, redundant transport client access servers, directory synchronisation, and highly available federation services. The design was flexible enough for SCU to scale out or to contract, according to its requirements.

By March 2012, SCU had a pilot up and running with 30 staff and 20 students. The pilot was a success and proved that the process was repeatable. Dimension Data transferred operational knowledge to SCU and the university elected to move the remaining staff and students across to the new email system, with Dimension Data acting in a support role. By the end of 2012, all staff and student email migration and desktop upgrades were complete.

 Result

Client satisfaction achieved

With a consistent level of collaboration between SCU and Dimension Data, the university experienced little impact on its business operations, while staff and students experienced little impact on their day-to-day activities.

According to Project Manager, Tim Lane:

“Not only did we meet all our project objectives and milestones and deliver under budget by approximately 15%, we also mitigated the risks relating to our email system. We now have a highly available email system and have ensured business continuity.”

“But even better, is that we are now providing a significantly improved email service to staff and students at the university and meeting their expectations in terms of functionality. We have anywhere, anytime, any device access to email; a single, integrated calendaring platform for students, staff and resources; and greater collaboration between staff, campuses and students.”

“The feedback on the project has been very positive and has indicated a high level of satisfaction with the new email system.”

Office 365 has delivered SCU greater reliability, security, and productivity at less cost than the on-premise SUN server infrastructure or applications. The security features and services associated with Office 365 are built in, reducing the time and cost associated with securing SCU’s IT systems. Office 365 offered SCU a cost effective solution for communications and file access, whether day-to-day or in disaster situations.

“From a long-term benefit point of view, moving email to the cloud has provided us with a Microsoft cloud roadmap, enabling us to pick and choose from the massive platform of Microsoft products available as we require,” concluded Tim Lane.

Services overview

- Exchange detailed design
- Design and implementation of Active Directory Federation Services (ADFS) for single sign-on and a high availability ADFS infrastructure
- Directory synchronisation implementation to reduce administration overhead of provisioning users in Office 365
- Design of migration approach using on-premise Exchange 2010 infrastructure as the platform for stepping to Office 365
- Project management to raise, track, and report on any issues, manage the change with SCU and minimise impact on the university
- The provisioning of Office 365 tenant and testing and proof of migration to Office 365