Non-profit leverages Zones services to increase branch office collaboration

The Challenge

After a series of mergers, a leading California child and family care non-profit wanted to increase collaboration between branches by consolidating its messaging environment from three independently managed and operated IT sites into a single cloud tenant solution – all while minimizing service disruption and downtime. One site, in San Leandro, CA, would continue to maintain its Exchange Server 2010 environment while the other two sites, located in Tustin, CA and Salinas, CA, would have their respective Exchange Server 2003 environments decommissioned upon the completion of moving all mail-enabled resources to the new Office 365 tenant.

In addition to minimizing service disruptions, it was important that any given solution include a migration strategy to allow these independent entities to communicate and collaborate through the project life cycle. Prior to project commencement, there was no unified global address list (GAL) and no resource sharing capabilities between the three sites.

The Solution

The customer engaged Zones Advanced Solutions Group to implement a Microsoft Office 365 transition solution to provide cloud-based messaging for their entire organization, including additional acquisitions during the project timeframe.

Challenge:

Implement Office 365 across multiple office locations

Solution:

Zones Advanced Solutions Group services

Benefits:

- Enhanced communications and collaboration
- Streamlined hardware and software management
- Flexible, cost-effective software licensing
- Positioned for leveraging social network capabilities
- Cost savings delivered by resource consolidation

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The Solution *cont.*

The existing messaging infrastructure was comprised of approximately 1,400 mailboxes totaling more than one (1) terabyte (TB) of messaging data across multiple sites comprised of on-premises versions of Exchange Server 2003 and 2010. The respective Exchange versions were hosted in separate Active Directory forests, each with unique SMTP domain names.

To begin the process, Zones engineers did a careful analysis of the entire Exchange environment and existing network to validate the technology could support Office 365 and Exchange Online. This was particularly important given the legacy Exchange environment. The team resolved technical issues and took added steps to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the migration including:

> Exchange Server updates

> Active Directory troubleshooting and updates

> Domain Name System (DNS) conflict resolution

> Increase in network bandwidth to support migration

While making preparations for the Exchange migration, Zones engineers ensured that the IT infrastructure was ready to support Office 365.

> Validated DNS environment and made changes where necessary

> Cleaned up existing Active Directory objects that were identified as not meeting the requirements for object synchronization or Office 365

> Configured existing Exchange environment to allow for a hybrid connection to Office 365

> Installed and configured DirSync to synchronize Active Directory objects to Office 365

Migration steps

When it was time for the migration, Zones engineers created mailbox batches so that like-resources were moved together. This led to a more efficient and effective migration process, while keeping end-users productive. A final synchronization was performed prior to cut over and mail was checked and validated for accuracy. Zones engineers held training sessions for network administrators, as well as created logon scripts to allow minimal impact to end users and administration of the new Exchange environment.

After successfully completing the migration, Zones engineers were onsite to provide technical and end-user support and training. They also stayed available remotely for 60 days post-migration to assist in resolving any issues surrounding Office 365.

The Benefits/Results

Enhanced communications and collaboration

By adopting Office 365 with Exchange Online, the IT team provides an email service that meets company business requirements, and it delivers access to improved communications and collaboration tools.

The organization, with its newly acquired companies, is seeing the potential to use Office 365 for much more than email.

With Office 365, employees can share best practices and exchange information more conveniently and quickly. The solution is also increasing collaboration, which is helping the entire organization strengthen their affiliation and deliver better customer services.

Next steps include leveraging the corporate social network capabilities to quickly bring people together so they can have conversations, collaborate on files, and organize projects. Employees can even extend conversations to customers and vendors.

Streamlined IT management

With the new environment, the IT organization is seeing a variety of short- and long-term benefits including:

> Less time and resources spent on hardware maintenance

> Streamlined management of Office 365 software and licensing

> Higher level of support, service, and resources for day-to-day operations

> Cost savings from the consolidation of resources

> New opportunities to deliver support and services to employees

Flexible software licensing

To implement the solution, the IT organization took advantage of the licensing flexibility provided by Office 365. They wanted to move people across platforms or provide them with new technologies without incurring any additional costs. With Office 365, the companies can get all of the client access licenses they need incorporated into one price. What's more, employees can be moved between on-premises and online deployments, as required.

Some employees receive Office 365 E1 license for Exchange Online and cloud-based Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Other employees and managers receive Office 365 Enterprise E3 licenses. In addition to Office applications, E3 includes Access for database applications. E3 also provides fully installed Office applications for tablet and phone.

Zones Advanced Solutions Group engineers implemented a solid Microsoft solution to merge the legacy networks into a single modern IT environment that benefits the business, end-users, and the IT organization.

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