



Premium Audit Firm Chooses Microsoft Online Services to Upgrade Messaging

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Insurance industry—Auditing

Customer Profile

With more than 1,000 employees and operations throughout North America, Overland Solutions, Inc. provides auditing and inspection services to insurance companies and other large organizations.

Business Situation

Overland Solutions wanted to streamline IT management, develop a less costly disaster-recovery strategy, and provide its field employees with the collaboration and messaging tools they needed.

Solution

Overland Solutions adopted the Microsoft Business Productivity Online Standard Suite to deliver an entire package of communication and collaboration solutions to its uniquely structured workforce.

Benefits

- More connected workforce
- Expanded, familiar environment
- Streamlined IT management
- Enhanced return on investment

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Overland Solutions, Inc. was interested in using cloud computing to help it streamline IT management; develop a more pragmatic disaster-recovery strategy; and provide its highly mobile and widely distributed field staff of auditors, inspectors, and sales representatives with the collaboration and messaging tools they needed. After evaluating the Google Apps suite of online productivity tools, the company instead adopted the Microsoft Business Productivity Online Standard Suite, a collection of email, instant messaging, web-conferencing, and collaboration solutions delivered as managed services through Microsoft Online Services. By delivering collaboration tools to its employees online, Overland Solutions can help keep its field staff better connected, deliver advanced yet familiar tools to more employees, reduce its IT management burden, and enhance the return on its IT investment.



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Situation

Overland Solutions, Inc. provides premium audit services, property inspections, and loss-control services for the insurance industry, government agencies, and other large organizations. Based in Overland Park, Kansas, Overland Solutions operates throughout the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The company has more than 1,000 employees and generates annual revenue of more than U.S.\$75 million.

Almost 75 percent of Overland Solutions employees operate outside of the company's headquarters and branch offices, working autonomously at customer sites. Because they are highly mobile and widely distributed, Overland Solutions sales representatives, premium auditors, and inspectors are often disconnected from the company network, which can make it challenging to efficiently maintain an effective communication and collaboration environment.

“Our people regularly find themselves working in locations that don't have reliable Internet connectivity,” says David R. Robinson, Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer at Overland Solutions. “They have to work autonomously, and that makes it much more complex for our IT shop to deploy software and manage network services.”

The company runs its desktop and portable computers with the Windows XP Professional operating system, and employees working in the Overland Solutions headquarters and branch offices have used Microsoft Office 2003 and Office 2007 productivity software. The company's 750 field employees mostly use applications built in-house by the Overland Solutions IT team. These applications include viewers for opening documents or

spreadsheets created with Microsoft Office Word or Office Excel spreadsheet software. If employees needed to manipulate a document or spreadsheet, they often used OpenOffice software.

“It wasn't the most elegant solution,” says Robinson. “But these people do not generate many of their own Word documents or Excel spreadsheets, and purchasing another 750 Office licenses would have been a significant expense that was hard to justify for very limited use.”

Overland Solutions managed its email messaging environment with Microsoft Exchange Server 2003. Office employees used the Microsoft Office Outlook messaging and collaboration client, while most field employees accessed email using Microsoft Outlook Web Access. The system worked well, but the company incurred costs associated with managing its own messaging infrastructure. It also had to develop a disaster-recovery strategy to ensure communication continuity.

“Exchange Server presents a relatively complex recovery scenario,” says Robinson. “It can be very expensive to prepare for that, and to be honest, I don't want to have to worry about my email environment in the middle of trying to recover all my other mission-critical systems.”

The company was interested in using cloud computing—technology resources hosted off-premises and delivered as online services—to help it reduce the management burden on its IT staff, and to help it develop a disaster-recovery strategy that would be less expensive and complex to implement.

Most of all, Overland Solutions needed a more efficient way to provide its field employees with the collaboration and

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messaging tools they needed. “Our biggest challenge is that we have a highly mobile workforce,” says Robinson. “We were interested in a cloud-based messaging solution that could help them to build some community and stay coordinated.”

Solution

In 2010, Overland Solutions began looking for a solution that would help it reduce the administrative burden and cost associated with its messaging infrastructure. The company initially evaluated the Google Apps suite of online productivity tools, letting 12 employees use Google Apps for almost three months.

“Google had an attractive offering from a pricing perspective, and the Gmail messaging solution seemed to work,” says Robinson. “But we thought Google had some serious limitations, such as inadequate offline access to productivity applications. For example, at that time you could not work offline on the Google Apps spread sheets.”

Overland Solutions began working with its Microsoft account team and Valorem Consulting, a member of the Microsoft Partner Network, to evaluate other cloud solutions. With offices in Kansas City and St. Louis, Missouri, Valorem Consulting specializes in delivering collaboration, business intelligence, and productivity solutions that help provide strategic value for its customers—using both on-premises and cloud technology.

Valorem demonstrated how Overland Solutions could use the Microsoft Business Productivity Online Standard Suite, offered through Microsoft Online Services, to deliver an entire package of collaboration solutions to its uniquely structured workforce. “We heard their need for a segmented solution,” says Dominick

Parretta, Managing Partner at Valorem Consulting. “And we showed Overland Solutions how the Business Productivity Online Standard Suite matched the segmented structure of its workforce.”

Overland Solutions decided to replace its existing on-premises messaging infrastructure with Microsoft Exchange Online, a hosted messaging service that it would no longer have to manage itself—or have to recover if a power loss, fire, or other event caused its data center to fail. And, by adopting the Business Productivity Online Standard Suite, the company added additional capabilities with Microsoft Office Communications Online instant messaging, Office Live Meeting web conferencing, and the SharePoint Online collaboration and document-sharing service.

Most significantly, Valorem Consulting showed Overland Solutions how Business Productivity Online Standard Suite could work with local installations of Microsoft Office Standard 2010 to extend the capabilities of Office 2010 to its entire workforce in a way that made sense economically. “When we compared Google Apps to the Microsoft Business Productivity Online Standard Suite with Office 2010 installed locally, we saw that Microsoft was the obvious choice,” says Robinson. “With Microsoft, we got collaboration capabilities and the full, rich experience of Office, instead of a very limited environment with Google.”

According to Robinson, employees at Overland Solutions are familiar with Outlook, and the company was concerned that adopting Gmail would have involved a significant change to the user interface of its email environment. “Our employees are very comfortable with Outlook,” he says. “Even some fundamental concepts like folders and tagging are organized

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differently in Gmail, and introducing our employees to a completely different tool set was just not attractive."

By November 2010, Overland Solutions had migrated more than 1,000 mailboxes to Exchange Online and moved its existing Windows SharePoint Services environment to SharePoint Online. The company initially deployed Office Live Meeting and Office Communications Online to IT staff computers, and then it began introducing both solutions to all company employees at the beginning of March 2011.

The company expects to have the Business Productivity Online Standard Suite deployed throughout the organization by the end of June 2011. It will install Microsoft Office Standard 2010 on all company computers and simultaneously upgrade its PC environment to the Windows 7 operating system during its regularly scheduled computer-refresh cycle.

Benefits

By adopting the Business Productivity Online Standard Suite, Overland Solutions can help keep its widely distributed and mobile field staff better connected, deliver advanced yet familiar tools to more employees, streamline IT management, and enhance its return on investment.

More Connected Workforce

Overland Solutions anticipates that by delivering new communication and collaboration tools to everybody in the organization, its highly mobile and widely distributed employees will be able to work more effectively while maintaining their autonomy at customer sites. For instance, by adding tools such as Office Communications Online and Office Live Meeting to traditional email and combining them all with features such as presence indication, Overland Solutions can help

keep its workforce connected to the company and to each other.

"Now, an auditor in the middle of Wyoming can use Office Communications Online to talk to his or her regional manager or ask a reviewer a question," says Robinson. "No matter where they are working from, field employees can use Office Live Meeting to collaborate with customers, colleagues, and partners in real time. They can use these new tools to find opportunities to be more productive and deliver more value to our customers."

Expanded, Familiar Environment

By delivering a collaboration and productivity tool set with a familiar interface, Overland Solutions can let its employees continue using the experience and training they've had and still deliver expanded capabilities to everybody in the organization. Now field employees can use the same tools in Office 2010 that employees in the company headquarters and branch offices can use.

"Being able to use Office 2010 to open and manipulate documents and spreadsheets is a great productivity opportunity for our field staff," says Robinson. "Now we can give them the tools that make sense for the business, and do it in a way that makes financial sense as well. We had already planned to upgrade computers in the offices to Office 2010, and now we can provide the identical messaging and productivity environment for every employee."

Streamlined IT Management

With cloud-based messaging and collaboration solutions provided as managed services, the IT department at Overland Solutions has reduced its infrastructure-management burden. It no longer has to administer an on-premises

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Valorem Consulting

Exchange Server or SharePoint environment, and it no longer has to install and maintain third-party instant-messaging or web-conferencing solutions, which reduces costs and frees IT staff to focus on maintaining the company’s proprietary applications.

The company also now has more peace of mind and will save money on its disaster-recovery plan. The company’s recovery-point objective for email is 24 hours, and Robinson and his team knew that to meet that objective in the event of a major data-center disaster would require a level of on-premises redundancy that would be prohibitively expensive and complex to manage. In contrast, the Business Productivity Online Standard Suite guarantees 99.9 percent uptime, without requiring any extra investment from Overland Solutions.

“With Exchange Online, I can maintain email connectivity for my entire enterprise even if my data center is a smoking hole in the ground,” says Robinson. “The redundancy is already provided by Microsoft, so we can avoid spending tens of thousands of dollars for something we may never need. And if something does happen, we can focus on recovering our mission-critical applications.”

Enhanced Return on Investment

According to Robinson, Overland Solutions made the right decision by choosing the Business Productivity Online Standard Suite and will receive a higher return on investment (ROI) than if it had chosen Google Apps. He says that, with Microsoft software, the company has expanded its messaging, collaboration, and productivity environments—and integrated them consistently across the entire enterprise—at very little additional cost.

“Before, we had almost no instant messaging, web conferencing, or SharePoint environment, and we couldn’t deploy Microsoft Office to the field staff,” says Robinson. “By deploying the Business Productivity Online Standard Suite, we’ve expanded our collaboration infrastructure across the entire organization for within 10 percent of what it cost us before to reach less than a quarter of our workforce. We anticipate significantly improved ROI.”

Parretta agrees that the Business Productivity Online Standard Suite offers better opportunities for companies like Overland Solutions and for IT partners such as Valorem Consulting. “With Microsoft, we can take our deep on-premises expertise and layer it with advanced cloud technology,” he says. “So we can take on more projects, complete them quickly, and deliver higher value to our customers.”

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 in the United States and Canada who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to:
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For more information about Valorem Consulting products and services, call (888) 660-5731 or visit the website at:
www.valoremconsulting.com

For more information about Overland Solutions, Inc. products and services, call (877) 856-8599 or visit the website at:
www.olsi.net

Microsoft Online Services

Microsoft Online Services are business-class communication and collaboration solutions delivered as a subscription service and hosted by Microsoft. With these offerings, customers can cost-effectively access the most up-to-date technologies and immediately benefit from streamlined communications, simplified management, and business-class reliability and security features.

For more information, visit:
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