

The Curtain Rises on a New IT Infrastructure for Major Theatre Operator

Overview

Country: Canada

Industry: Entertainment

Customer Profile

Cineplex Entertainment LP is the largest motion picture exhibitor in Canada. Based in Toronto, the company operates Cineplex Odeon, Coliseum, Colossus, Famous Players, Galaxy, and SilverCity theaters.

Business Situation

Over time, Cineplex Entertainment LP inherited a mixed IT environment that was difficult for its IT staff to maintain and didn't provide end users with the tools they needed to work efficiently.

Solution

With such a diverse amount of applications, Cineplex Entertainment LP decided to standardize on a Microsoft® platform for increased reliability and the scalability to handle future growth.

Benefits

- Improved management and security
- Increased end-user satisfaction
- Enhanced scalability

“With a strong Microsoft platform in place, we were able to easily scale the system to include the additional Famous Player sites that were added to our family of theatres.”

Jeff Kent, Chief Technology Officer, Cineplex Entertainment LP

Cineplex Entertainment LP is the largest theatre operator in Canada, operating 130 theatres under six brands. Through a number of mergers and acquisitions, the company's IT infrastructure had become too heterogeneous and complicated to effectively manage. The IT team realized it needed a reliable platform with centralized management capabilities, increased security functionality, and enhanced end-user features. Working with Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner LegendCorp, the company decided to implement a new infrastructure that incorporated several key products, including Microsoft Operations Manager, Microsoft Systems Management Server, Microsoft Exchange Server, and the Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003 operating system. The upgrade improved management and security, increased staff satisfaction, and provided a scalable platform to support growth.

Situation

Based in Toronto, Cineplex Entertainment LP operates 130 theatres under the Cineplex Odeon, Coliseum, Colossus, Famous Players, Galaxy, and SilverCity brands. As the largest theatre operator in Canada, with a total of 1,269 screens across the country, the company has a proud history of entertaining generations of Canadians.

Formed through the merging and acquisition of three companies in three years, each with different IT infrastructures, Cineplex Entertainment LP found itself with a complex IT system that was difficult to manage and operate. To improve functionality, the IT team realized it needed to overhaul the company's entire system.

"We had a very complicated and heterogeneous system that made it almost impossible for the IT team to identify and properly manage each component and application," says Jeffrey Kent, Chief Technology Officer at Cineplex Entertainment LP. "We had inherited a very diverse mix of systems when all of the separate companies were merged under the Cineplex Entertainment umbrella. To streamline system management, improve security, and build a reliable infrastructure that could sustain future growth, we knew we had to build a new system from scratch."

One of the goals of the upgrade was to improve security and management. The IT team did not have technology that allowed it to easily identify applications and components connected to the company's network. They were also unable to easily update patches, troubleshoot software and hardware problems, or load the latest applications onto company PCs and laptops.

"With theatres across the country and an IT team stationed in Toronto, it was impossible for us to ensure that all applications were

properly patched and up-to-date without sending staff to each theatre," says Kent. "We wanted a solution that would allow us to manage our entire system from the Toronto head-office and keep security as up-to-date as possible."

The company also struggled with a clunky Lotus Notes e-mail system. The system did not allow users to access e-mail remotely over the Internet or provide an intuitive interface. The IT team also struggled to keep user profiles and access levels up-to-date. Coupled with that, Cineplex ran several outdated operating systems and databases that did not integrate well together.

"We were at a point where there was no way to reconcile our old system into a single, seamless infrastructure that allowed us to make the most of the resources in our IT team," says Kent. "In the past, much of the system's day-to-day operations had been outsourced to an affiliate company in New York. We had reached a point where that relationship was ending and we needed to make sure we had an infrastructure in place that our internal team could manage, without additional hires."

To develop a plan to upgrade the system, the IT team contacted Microsoft Gold Certified Partner LegendCorp for guidance.

Solution

After looking at the company's existing system and reviewing its long-term goals, LegendCorp recommended moving to Microsoft® Windows Server System™ integrated server software. The solution would include key management and security products, as well as an upgraded operating system and e-mail server.

"We knew that a Microsoft system would meet the company's needs at an affordable price," says Andy Papadopoulos, President,

LegendCorp. "Microsoft offers a suite of enterprise products that provides cutting-edge functionality for everything from databases and e-mail to Point of Purchase (PoP) systems.

"We also knew that the Microsoft solution would enable the IT team to manage the entire Cineplex Entertainment system from its Toronto office, eliminating the need for additional staff."

For improved management and security, the new solution included Microsoft Operations Manager (MOM) 2005, Microsoft Systems Management Server (SMS), and Microsoft Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server 2004. As the flagship Microsoft management solution, MOM 2005 allows users to centrally monitor distributed IT systems and proactively identify and resolve IT issues before problems occur. SMS empowers IT pros with the ability to centrally push patches and software updates to computers connected through a common network. ISA Server provides application-layer firewall protection for enterprise users.

"The Microsoft solution proposed by LegendCorp would provide our team with the capability to centrally monitor and update applications and hardware on our system, no matter where they were located geographically," says Kent. "Combined with the ISA Server firewall, the solution significantly improved IT security and reliability at all of our theatres and offices."

The new solution also incorporated Microsoft Exchange Server 2003, Microsoft's messaging and collaboration server, and Microsoft Office Outlook® 2003, Microsoft's messaging and collaboration client. The Microsoft messaging technologies integrate much better with Microsoft Office System 2003, which Cineplex uses as its standard across all its theatres, than it does with Lotus

Notes. LegendCorp also provided the extended Cineplex Entertainment team with an online e-mail tool that provides extensive functionality, far above what was offered by Lotus Notes.

"With Exchange Server, we finally have a solution that caters to our full-time management staff who often need to access e-mail from home or while on the road," says Kent. "While Lotus Notes also provides online e-mail access, the solution is far less robust than that offered by Exchange."

For increased reliability, Cineplex Entertainment LP opted for the Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003 operating system. In addition to providing a more stable platform, the operating system also makes it easier for the company to expand and add additional locations to its network. The operating system includes advanced user-profile management technology called Active Directory® service, which allows the IT team to more easily manage user passwords and user access to folders.

"The Active Directory component in Windows Server 2003 provides us with the much needed capability of better management of user information access and passwords," says Kent. "We have a very transient group of part-time employees who leave the company to attend school or travel during the fall. It's very important for us to be able to close down passwords or restrict user access to protect critical company data."

The final aspect of the project focused on upgrading the company's desktop computers to the Microsoft Windows® XP operating system. Windows XP was also deployed on the Point of Sale (PoS) computers, supported by the Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 database, to speed ticket sales and increase staff productivity.

Benefits

Since the project's early stages in October 2004, Cineplex Entertainment LP has seen a remarkable number of benefits from its upgraded system, including improved management and security and increased end-user satisfaction. The new system has already helped the company expand to include several new theatres through a significant merger with another operator.

"Overhauling a large company's entire IT system is not a task for the faint hearted," says Kent. "Without Microsoft's solid product support and LegendCorp's guidance during the implementation, I would have been very reluctant to attempt such a large-scale project. With the project nearly complete, there are so many benefits that it is hard to quantify the positive effect the project will have on our company."

Improved Management and Security

One of the key goals of this project was to improve overall manageability and security at Cineplex Entertainment LP. With the deployment of MOM, SMS, and ISA Server, the IT team now has the tools to efficiently manage its distributed network and ensure that applications are adequately secure with the most recent firewall technology and software patches.

"Before we implemented the Microsoft management and security solutions, there was almost no way for us to really monitor our system, proactively identify issues, or patch applications," says Kent. "With the Microsoft technology, we now have a highly advanced system that allows our IT team to closely manage and update our entire system from our Toronto headquarters."

MOM and SMS make it possible for the IT team to anticipate and resolve network issues before they occur and push monthly application patches to company computers.

ISA Server, combined with other firewall technology from Cisco, helps Cineplex Entertainment LP meet potential cyber attacks with a formidable first-line defense system.

Additional benefits came from the migration to Microsoft Exchange Server and Outlook 2003. Because the technologies are designed to work with Microsoft Windows Server, the IT team can now manage identities and access management using Active Directory, the identity management technology built into Windows Server. The integrated products have streamlined overall security and management for the IT team, saving them time and money.

Increased End-User Satisfaction

One of the major complaints of staff at Cineplex Entertainment LP was the limited functionality of the Lotus Notes e-mail client. Staff often complained about its inability to display the number of messages in a folder or to allow users to properly store sent messages. Users also complained that the Lotus Notes interface was less intuitive than that offered by Microsoft Office Outlook.

The upgrade to Exchange Server 2003 has provided staff with a range of efficiency-enhancing functionality and provided them with remote e-mail access through Microsoft Office Outlook Web Access. Users have found that Outlook Web Access provides them with a robust interface similar in appearance and functionality to the Outlook client software interface.

"Staff across the company has expressed excitement about the upgrade to Exchange Server," says Kent. "There was a lot of dissatisfaction and frustration with the old e-mail system and its functionality. With Exchange, our staff now has a familiar user interface loaded with a wide array of capabilities and online access."

According to the Cineplex Entertainment IT team, the upgrade to Exchange Server and Outlook 2003 has reduced the number of calls to the help desk because the staff is more familiar with the Microsoft technology.

Enhanced Scalability

Since the project started in the fall of 2004, the company has grown to include the Famous Player brands and theatres across Canada, doubling the overall size of the business. While this type of expansion would have been an IT nightmare under the old system, the Microsoft upgrade helped the IT team manage the growth with ease.

“With a strong Microsoft platform in place, we were able to easily scale the system to include the additional Famous Players sites that were added to our family of theatres,” says Kent. “Although the acquisition doubled our size, our new Microsoft system enabled the IT team to take on the extra work with only a 24 percent increase in IT staff.”

Future Projects

With a strong and reliable platform in place, the Cineplex Entertainment IT team is excited about adding other Microsoft technologies to its repertoire. The team has already begun another project to add Microsoft Windows SharePoint® Services for improved file sharing across the organization.

Other future projects include adding Microsoft Office Live Communications Server 2005 for improved staff collaboration and efficiency.

For More Information

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For more information about LegendCorp products and services, call (416) 465-4540 or visit the Web site at: www.legendcorp.com

For more information about Cineplex Entertainment LP products and services, call (416) 323-6600 or visit the Web site at: www.cineplex.com

Microsoft Windows Server System

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For more information about Windows Server System, go to: <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsserversystem>

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Software and Services

- Windows Server 2003
- Exchange Server 2003
- Systems Management Server 2003
- Internet Security and Accelerator Server 2004
- Microsoft Operations Manager
- Outlook 2003
- Active Directory
- Outlook Web Access

Partner

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