



Auto Distributor Cuts Costs, Saves Mobile Employees More Than 15 Minutes a Day

Overview

Country or Region: Canada

Industry: Manufacturing—Automotive

Customer Profile

Subaru Canada distributes vehicles, parts, and warranty coverage to 86 independent dealers across Canada. Based in Mississauga, Ontario, it has 120 employees.

Business Situation

Subaru Canada wanted to improve the efficiency of its communications, especially among mobile employees who frequently had to call to check their voice-mail messages.

Solution

Subaru Canada implemented Microsoft® Exchange Server 2010 Enterprise including voice-to-text conversion for voice-mail messages.

Benefits

- Improved worker productivity
- Reduced cost to support mobile employees
- Larger mailboxes with reduced storage costs
- Improved IT efficiency

“With Exchange Server 2010 and voice-to-text conversion, within 20 seconds after a dealer leaves a voice-mail message, our users see an e-mail preview of that message on their mobile devices.”

George Hamin, Director of E-Business and Information Systems, Subaru Canada

Subaru Canada, which distributes vehicles to dealerships nationwide, wanted to improve its employees' communications productivity—especially for its mobile sales staff, who frequently had to check in for voice-mail messages. With the help of LegendCorp, a Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner, Subaru Canada implemented Microsoft Exchange Server 2010 Enterprise as part of a unified communications strategy. Subaru Canada will use Exchange Server 2010 to save mobile employees more than 15 minutes a day, while also saving money on phone charges, because the employees no longer have to dial in to check voice-mail messages. The company will also take advantage of Exchange Server 2010 to provide users with larger mailboxes at a lower cost, deliver a highly available solution while improving IT efficiency, and more easily comply with regulations.



Situation

Subaru Canada distributes vehicles to 86 independent dealerships across Canada, and it supplies those dealerships with parts, service, and warranty coverage. A wholly owned subsidiary of Fuji Heavy Industries, Subaru Canada is based in Mississauga, Ontario, and has about 120 employees in three nationwide offices.

"We're a sales organization supporting dealers around the country," says George Hamin, Director of E-Business and Information Systems at Subaru Canada.

"Many of our employees spend their time on the road, traveling to visit these dealerships." Those employees used to interrupt their work throughout the day by calling to check their voice-mail messages, hindering their productivity.

Among both traveling employees and those in the office, e-mail volumes were increasing. "Our users are relying on e-mail more and more every year," says John Hamin, Network Administrator at Subaru Canada. The company was using Microsoft® Exchange Server 2007 for e-mail, and although it was generally happy with the software, the company wanted to continue efforts to improve e-mail availability regardless of network and environmental conditions. "I get more calls if the e-mail service goes down than if the phone or fax service goes down," John Hamin says.

As e-mail volumes proliferated, some users reached e-mail storage limits. But the high cost of storage prevented Subaru Canada from expanding mailbox sizes. "We have allowed our employees 2 gigabytes of storage on the server," John Hamin says. "Some users would store 4 gigabytes or even 20 gigabytes if we'd let them, but that hasn't been feasible."

Most importantly, the company wanted to improve employee communications. "To that end," says George Hamin, "in 2008 we deployed Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007. We found that the unified communications project brought us a lot of benefits." He wondered if new e-mail server software might bring expanded communications capabilities that could further improve employee productivity.

Solution

Subaru Canada decided to deploy Microsoft Exchange Server 2010 as part of its continuing unified communications strategy. For earlier components of that plan, including implementation of Office Communications Server 2007 in 2008 and Office Communications Server 2007 R2 in 2009, Subaru Canada had teamed with LegendCorp, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner based in Toronto.

LegendCorp, in business since 1989, designs and implements solutions based on Microsoft software. "We look at an organization holistically, rather than product-by-product," says Andy Papadopoulos, Chief Executive Officer of LegendCorp. "With Subaru Canada, we jointly developed a vision of an integrated platform, designed an end state, and then divided the solution into components that the company could accomplish given time and budget constraints."

Confirms George Hamin, "LegendCorp understands the technology and how it all works together. It has been wonderful to work with." In May 2009, when LegendCorp recommended that Subaru Canada install a prerelease version of Microsoft Exchange Server 2010 Enterprise for e-mail, calendaring, and voice mail, the Hamins quickly agreed. They installed the software on two Dell PowerEdge M610 blade server computers with dual quad-core processors.

By September, Subaru Canada had deployed Exchange Server 2010 to about 90 percent of its users, with the remaining users expected to convert in October. "The migration process was quite easy," says John Hamin, "with a workflow similar to the migration we had done for Exchange Server 2007 and a seamless user experience involving no downtime." Subaru Canada also deployed the new solution at a company-owned dealership that is adjacent to Subaru Canada headquarters.

Exchange Server 2010 includes several new features that help Subaru Canada users communicate more effectively. The voice-mail preview feature provides voice-to-text conversion for voice-mail messages: users can see a text version of voice-mail messages in their unified inbox, accessed through the Microsoft Outlook®, Outlook Web App, or Outlook Mobile messaging and collaboration clients. Furthermore, users can view e-mail messages in a threaded conversation view, arranged by topic.

In addition, Exchange Server 2010 offers disk input/output (I/O) more suitable for inexpensive Serial Advanced Technology Attachment (SATA) disks, and it lowers overall disk I/O by up to 70 percent compared with Exchange Server 2007. The software introduces a simplified approach to high availability and disaster recovery with database availability groups, which maintain availability and fast recovery with up to 16 managed replicas of each mailbox database. Exchange Server 2010 also has new integrated compliance functionality—including archiving, granular multi-mailbox search, and legal hold—that eases regulatory compliance and discovery.

Because Exchange Server 2010 works so well with Office Communications Server 2007 R2, Subaru Canada is able to provide

users with a seamless experience among asynchronous communications (such as e-mail, voice mail, and calendaring) and synchronous (real-time) communications. Furthermore, employees' presence information—such as "busy," "in a meeting," or "out of office"—is automatically updated based on the meetings and appointments stored in their Exchange Server 2010 calendars.

Benefits

Subaru Canada will use Exchange Server 2010 to improve the productivity of its employees and reduce the cost of supporting mobile workers. It will also use the software to reduce storage costs, improve IT efficiency, and serve as a foundation for addressing future needs.

Improved Worker Productivity

"Exchange Server 2010 has features that our users love," says George Hamin. He cites voice-to-text conversion, conversation view, and the unified inbox as three features that will make users' lives easier.

He compares Exchange Server 2010 improvements in the usability of remote voice-mail with the improvements that previous versions of Exchange Server brought for remote users accessing e-mail. "With previous versions, our users could start a portable computer anywhere and get their messages without the need for a virtual private network," he says. "Now, with Exchange Server 2010 and Office Communications Server 2007 R2, that benefit is extended to the voice-mail realm. Next month I'm on vacation, but for anyone trying to reach me, it'll be like I never left the office. Whether you dial my extension or send me an e-mail message, as long as my \$200 netbook has an Internet connection I can respond from anywhere."

"Now, thanks to reductions in disk utilization in Exchange Server 2010, we have a wider array of storage options and don't necessarily have to purchase a big storage area network."

John Hamin, Network Administrator,
Subaru Canada

The productivity increases are greatest for traveling employees. "Our salespeople need to respond quickly to dealer concerns," says George Hamin. "With Exchange Server 2010 and voice-to-text conversion, within 20 seconds after a dealer leaves a voice-mail message, our users see an e-mail preview of that message on their mobile devices. Our mobile employees might check voice mail anywhere from 5 to 10 times a day, at 5 to 10 minutes a session. By using Office Communications Server 2007 R2 and taking advantage of the voice-mail preview feature in Exchange Server 2010, they can increase their responsiveness while saving more than 15 minutes a day. From a business perspective, that's an incredibly valuable productivity increase."

Reduced Cost to Support Mobile Employees

Not only is Subaru Canada improving its mobile employees' productivity, but it is also reducing the cost of supporting them. "Because Exchange Server 2010 automatically delivers voice-mail messages and previews to our employees' mobile devices, we save money on long-distance phone calls," George Hamin says. "Since employees don't have to dial in to check voice-mail messages, we're reducing per-minute charges for cell phones."

The software also contributes to the company's effort to simplify its telecommunications infrastructure. "Our next step, as part of the unified communications strategy with Office Communications Server 2007 R2, is to reduce the number of phone numbers," says George Hamin. "Each person will have one phone number, and it will ring where he or she wants it to. And if the person doesn't answer, the message will be part of the unified inbox in Exchange Server 2010."

Larger Mailboxes with Reduced Storage Costs

Subaru Canada has not yet decided on a user mailbox size, but it will be significantly bigger than the 2-gigabyte limit that is currently enforced. Having the bigger mailboxes will alleviate a key user pain point, giving employees the option to keep as many e-mail messages as they want, without having to spend time archiving or deleting to stay under the limit.

At the same time, however, the improved storage efficiency of Exchange Server 2010 means that the Subaru Canada IT department can look at larger, cheaper storage options. "As our users' e-mail traffic increased, we started looking into adding more capacity to our expensive storage infrastructure," says John Hamin. "Now, thanks to reductions in disk utilization in Exchange Server 2010, we have a wider array of storage options and don't necessarily have to purchase a big storage area network."

Furthermore, the reduced cost of storage means that Subaru Canada has been able to fold the corporate-owned dealership into its Exchange Server 2010 infrastructure, adding 50 additional users at a very low cost.

Improved IT Efficiency

Subaru Canada will use Exchange Server 2010 to improve the performance of its messaging service, providing a highly available solution. John Hamin says, "The improvements in high-availability clustering in Exchange Server 2010 give me confidence that our services will stay up, and the fact that our data is secured in database availability groups helps me sleep better at night."

Subaru Canada will use Exchange Server 2010 to set up a high-availability

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George Hamin, Director of E-Business and Information Systems, Subaru Canada

environment in its Montreal branch office. "Previously we merely replicated data to Montreal, but we had no e-mail server there—it was more for disaster recovery," says George Hamin. "Because of the improved capabilities of Exchange Server 2010, we'll have server redundancy there to ensure better business performance for our users."

In addition, Subaru Canada will do all this without increasing its IT staff. "We have a pretty small IT shop, so we don't have the staff to manage the functions of different servers 24 hours a day," says George Hamin. "In the current economic situation, because there's not a lot of money to go around for labor, we need to increase our services without increasing our headcount. One way we've done this is to take advantage of the transfer of skills across Microsoft applications, so that we don't have to hire one person with specific skills for each application."

Strong Foundation for Future Improvements

Subaru Canada expects to explore additional features of Exchange Server 2010 to address challenges that may arrive in the future. For example, as a subsidiary of a Japanese company, Subaru Canada may face challenges meeting increasingly stringent compliance mandated by J-SOX, the Japanese version of the U.S. Sarbanes-Oxley Act for financial reporting. Previously, when users reached the maximum mailbox size, they archived data on DVDs or portable computers. But due to risks of theft, loss, or deterioration, neither is a good storage medium. "With Exchange Server 2010," says George Hamin, "we will investigate archiving and retention on the server using low-cost disks rather than costly or risky alternatives." John Hamin adds, "Thus, in the event that we have to do some sort of discovery, Exchange Server

2010 gives us better access to users' e-mail messages."

In another future project, Subaru Canada may explore implementing Exchange Server 2010 at additional dealerships nationwide. "Because all of the other dealerships are independent businesses, they can use whichever messaging solution they want," says George Hamin. "But based on our success internally and with one dealership, we have seen that if our dealers wanted us to manage their e-mail messaging through Exchange Server 2010, that's a service we could provide at a very low incremental cost."

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