

Arizona State University deploys Google Apps in less than 2 weeks



At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Lower their administration costs
- Provide a solution that would allow them to move users over to a new system without disrupting students and faculty

What they did

- Migrated 65,000 students onto Google Apps for Education, providing email and collaboration tools at no cost
- Integrated email with student administration systems making the solution secure and easy to deploy and maintain

What they accomplished

- Saved over \$353,000 per year on mail system alone
- Provided new technology for its students
- Freed up talented IT resources to focus attention on creative university tech-projects

Google Apps for Education is helping ASU become a highly flexible university that can provide extraordinary technology experiences for its students."

—Kari Barlow, Assistant Vice President, University Technology Office

In 2006 Arizona State University (ASU) made Google Apps for Education available to 65,000 students. ASU configured and deployed Google Apps, in under two weeks, including integrating it with their home-grown single sign-on and user provisioning system. The remaining community, including faculty, staff and alumni were migrated onto Google Apps in 2007.

Challenge

During planning, members of the University Technology Office at Arizona State University asked themselves some important questions: "Why is our talented IT staff spending so much time patching, upgrading and maintaining software and hardware systems that don't keep up with the pace of innovation in consumer technology? And how do we get those staff members to focus on creative applications of technology specific to our university?"

ASU identified student email as an area where technology companies were rapidly developing innovative solutions for consumers. Also, administration costs were spiraling as ASU was forced to spend more on spam filters, virus protection software, and storage upgrades. According to Ron Page, Director of Technology Integration at Arizona State's University Technology Office, "ASU's homegrown web mail client required consistent development attention to keep it close to the state of the art. Even though ASU's disk quotas were severely limited compared to Google's 2GB per mailbox offering, maintaining a secure, backed-up email service consumed significant hardware and technical resources." All told, ASU was spending over \$353,000 per year for a mail system that wasn't as powerful as the personal accounts that students could get for free.

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Decision

ASU studied a number of potential alternatives to its current hardware and software email system configuration. After the investigation, ASU chose to deploy Google Apps for Education. Google Apps for Education is a suite of free, secure tools that includes Gmail, Calendar, Sites & Documents. ASU picked Google Apps for the following reasons:

1. Students were already using it: From mail logs, ASU could see that approximately 3,500 students were already forwarding their student email to Gmail; this gave ASU confidence that the solution would be well received, and that students would know how to use it – thus eliminating any training costs. "I enjoy using Gmail because it lets me keep a lot of my emails, especially those with attachments, without going over my quota," said David Aniuk, an Arizona State University student. "I really like the layout too; it's not very overwhelming to look at so it doesn't strain my eyes. And I have not received a single spam email in my Gmail account," he added.

About Google Apps for Education

Google Apps Education Edition is a free suite of hosted communication & collaboration applications designed for schools and universities. Google Apps includes Gmail (webmail services), Google Calendar (shared calendaring), Google Talk (instant messaging and voice over IP), Google Docs (online document creation & sharing) and a Start Page for creating a customizable homepage on a specific domain, as well as administrative tools, customer support, and access to APIs to integrate Google Apps with existing IT systems.

For more information visit
www.google.com/edu/apps

2. Best existing product with a compelling long-term vision: Previously, ASU only offered its students email; however, ASU realized that Google Apps for Education would make it easier for students to collaborate with each other and for the school to communicate with students. ASU was excited about Google's goal to create a unified communications hub that included a number of applications, with the email inbox at its center. Kari Barlow, Assistant Vice President, University Technology Office, felt that "Google's tightly integrated messaging suite is the industry-leading web solution," and that "the browser integration of webmail, instant messaging and calendaring is second to none."
3. Continuous innovation: The university recognized that Google's proven email (Gmail), IM (Chat) and Calendar applications were not just innovative, but were continuing to evolve. According to Adrian Sanner, University Technology Officer, "ASU also realized that we'd benefit from Google's unique approach to software development and deployment, where Google's perpetual innovation process will bring a steady stream of improvements and new products to the solution, deployed without disturbing the user experience."

Deployment

ASU went from final decision to deployment of Google Apps for Education in under two weeks. Top priorities for ASU were integrating email with existing security and student administration systems so the solution would be safe and easy to deploy and maintain.

Integration with security systems: ASU has a student single sign-on system, developed in-house, that's similar to the Yale CAS system. Once signed in, a student has seamless access to personal registration, transcripts, course assignments and other information without having to log into multiple systems. ASU was able to integrate Google Apps into this homegrown system in a matter of days using Google's single sign-on API, based on the SAML 2.x standard. According to Ron Page, Director of Technology Integration for ASU's Technology Office, "The single sign-on works as advertised and was extremely straightforward." He added, "It's amazing how responsive Google has been to our needs."

Integration with student administration systems: Not only did ASU want to ensure that its deployment was well integrated for students, but it also wanted to make it as easy to administer as possible. ASU was able to use Google's available REST-based user provisioning API to integrate Google Apps with its home-grown user provisioning system in less than a week. Now ASU can automatically add, pause and remove students from Google Apps as their status changes in ASU's registration system.

Phased user migration: ASU needed a solution that would allow them to move users over to a new system without disrupting students and faculty using their existing implementation. With Google Apps and a mail gateway ASU was able to maintain student and staff's @asu.edu email namespace on either Google's system or their own. This integration allowed ASU to migrate students mid-year to Google Apps for Education without disrupting student's email service while preserving their original email address.