The University of Dundee Implements a Campus-Wide Strategy to Dramatically Reduce Storage Costs and Streamline Email Management with Messaging Architects’ M+Archive

Over the past few years the University of Dundee has been working on rolling out a campus-wide email retention strategy to reduce storage costs, proactively deploy the tools for quick electronic discovery and improve collaboration for 28,000 end users encompassing faculty, staff and students. Messaging Architects enables them to accomplish these objectives with the comprehensive functionality of M+Archive and a high quality of customer support.

The Challenge: Containing Storage Costs Associated with the Ever-Growing Volume of Email

The University of Dundee has an IT Department of about 70 people who support approximately 28,000 end users. Currently, they rely on Novell GroupWise for all their collaboration needs. Similar to other educational institutions, email is a mission-critical application for Dundee.

A lot of the interactions between students and professors are also done via email: for instance, essays are submitted over email, as well as any group work is passed around in email. Naturally, assignments are tied to deadlines, so the email system cannot have any interruptions. Email is also the primary medium for students who go to work on projects overseas to keep in touch with their supervisors in Scotland.

Mary Shrimpton, Email Service Coordinator at Dundee, is in charge of the University’s email and archiving system; she also coordinates the activities with the technical support staff responsible for all component of the email service.

“Email is very important for our institution and has to be available all the time,” confirms Mary Shrimpton. “In fact, some of the business processes we use depend on email arriving and being acted on, so we are very reliant on it.”

One of the direct implications of the relevance of email at Dundee was the rising growth of email data and the respective need for more storage. Even though in theory there is a maximum size quota of 300MG per mailbox, the IT Department cannot enforce it strictly.

“Essentially, users choose what to keep. While the majority manages with the allocated size, there are some very large mailboxes, as well – with sizes of 10GB and above,” explains Mary Shrimpton. “There are power users who need larger mailboxes to do their work and we can’t really restrict them.”

The challenge for the University of Dundee was to find a cost-effective way to provide enough storage for email to the staff and students without resorting to email size quotas that could impact their users’ productivity and effectiveness.
M+Archive: A Cost-Effective Solution to Contain Hardware Costs and Address eDiscovery Quickly and Efficiently

The relationship between the University of Dundee and Messaging Architects developed over the years at events and seminars of the GroupWise community in the UK and the rest of Europe. For a few years now, the University of Dundee has been using M+Archive.

Mary Shrimpton herself was involved in the original decision to invest in an archiving solution. The decision was made at a time when email archiving was not perceived as a must-have component for effective email management at educational institutions. The main driver was solving the storage problem by adopting an email archiving strategy.

Through the implementation of an archiving solution, the University would be able to offload the growing, yet not regularly accessed, email data from expensive SAN storage used for the GroupWise message store to more economical storage. Secondly, individual users who used GroupWise personal archiving archived their mailboxes locally to file store, which was not very cost effective either.

“In reality we didn’t need to keep all those messages there,” says Shrimpton. “The archiving software was going to help us gradually move all the old messages away from the SAN and file systems onto more affordable storage. The objective is to keep the archives available to our users without clogging the systems. This strategy directly affects GroupWise performance and availability, as well.”

Centralized email archiving has not been fully rolled out at all colleges yet; however, things are expected to pick up pace in the coming months. So far, messages older than two years have been archived and removed from the GroupWise system for the Schools of Medicine, Law and the Centre for Energy, Petroleum and Mineral Law and Policy. The real differentiator that weighed heavily in favor of M+Archive is the solution’s support for stubbing in GroupWise. Dundee takes full advantage of the feature both to address its storage issues and to provide seamless access of the archives to the ends users.

“The stubbing feature has really been positive. It helped with the quick adoption of M+Archive by end users, as the access to the archives is quite transparent. Those users with really large mailboxes experience the benefits the most. If we have to run a check on those accounts, there is a dramatic difference in the speed with which a check can be performed on them compared to the situation before,” continues Shrimpton. “Also, we received excellent support from the Messaging Architects during the pilot phase of the archiving project and since its roll-out across the campus.”

The University of Dundee preserves all emails of students and staff. Email resides on the GroupWise server for a period of 24 months, after which it is moved to the M+Archive repository and is retained for as long as the respective user is at the University. Users have access to their archives both through the GroupWise client and the WebAccess client.

Even though educational institutions in the UK are not nearly as regulated regarding email retention as they are in the United States, M+Archive has enabled Dundee to be much more efficient when having to produce email records related to open records requests or in cases of eDiscovery.

“In the past, when we had to look for specific emails, we would actually have to go into the live email system to access the particular account – this wasn’t so easy, given that GroupWise is very secure,” recalls Mary Shrimpton. “Overall, it was a very time-consuming process that involved finding the messages in question, copying and printing them. M+Archive really makes the search and retrieval process much faster and easier.”

In addition to streamlining GroupWise management, Shrimpton sees another benefit of fully deploying M+Archive across all the campuses: that of having The University’s email system streamlined and prepared in the eventuality of an email platform migration.

“Nothing has been decided at this point in time,” says Shrimpton. “However, in the event that we have to move away from GroupWise, having the bulk of messages already residing in a separate archive repository in a format that is accessible regardless of the email platform will be a huge benefit both in terms of time and cost savings.”

The Bottom Line: Making the Most of Dundee’s IT Resources without Forgoing End-User Productivity

Since the deployment of M+Archive the University of Dundee has been able to reclaim valuable SAN systems by moving the large GroupWise archives to less expensive SATA disks. The move has had no impact on user access to the archived email.

Mary Shrimpton has started compiling data on the potential savings with respect to storage the University will accomplish over the coming year thanks to M+Archive implementation across all colleges. “Just by remaining at the current level of SAN technology without the need to invest in additional systems will result in considerable savings for the University,” she concludes.