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Case Study: Email Archival and Retrieval: Every School District Needs It

The Auburn-Washburn School District provides public education to approximately 5,300 Kindergarten through 12th graders in Topeka, KS. It consists of 128 square miles of rural and suburban areas. Descriptive terms like academically challenging, progressive, small classes, high-achievement, modern and excellent are all used to describe the district.

The Auburn-Washburn School District consists of nine schools and a total of 903 teachers and administrators who use email through the district's main server. These 903 education professionals average 12,000-14,000 emails per day. The large number of individual users coupled with the enormous volume created an interesting challenge for Don Williams, Director of Information Technology at the Auburn District, when a federal mandate required him to implement an email archive solution for the entire district.

A New Term to Learn: E-Discovery

The tremendous growth in email usage has made email a primary source of legal discovery. When organizations are faced with litigation, producing email is virtually inevitable. Every organization must now implement effective and efficient email archive solutions in order to meet the e-discovery demands of possible litigation.

When thinking about e-discovery, many neglect to consider how preserved emails could be used to mount an aggressive defense that can save organizations fortunes in unnecessary settlements and verdicts. Additionally, according to the new Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (FRCP), it is actually a federal offense to destroy emails.

The bottom line is, most organizations need an email archive with search and retrieval functionality, and school districts are just as susceptible to litigation as any organization.

The Selection Process

According to Williams, the FRCP law (technically an amendment) was passed in December 2006, but it actually took the district until February 2007 to get the law interpreted to the point where they felt confident their implementation would be compliant. In Kansas, they also had state law to contend with. Interestingly, the state always had a seven-year retention timeframe for paper records, but never specified an end timeframe when emails could be discarded.

In February, 2007, Williams, with Auburn-Washburn School District Network Specialist, Mark Mitchell, set about the task of selecting email archival software. Since the district did not have an email archival solution previously, they were starting from scratch. In a way, this was good, because there are three parts to this process, archival, search and output, with security concerns at each step. It can be most advisable to install a complete solution rather than a patchwork of individual segments.

Although there was no timeframe specified for the installation, Williams felt, "It was important to get it done as quickly as possible." Fortunately, Williams and Mitchell had anticipated this mandate and had reviewed available products about a year earlier. So, when the time came to narrow the decision, they targeted three products for serious consideration.

The ViewWise Email Archive Solution

Computhink offered several features in their ViewWise Email Archive that others did not. First, ViewWise interfaces directly with Novell GroupWise, which the Auburn district was already using for email. Second,

Computhink technical experts were willing to work with such a large-scale project involving over 900 users and almost 14,000 emails per day. Third, ViewWise offered a highly advanced search engine, enabling search by keyword, date, timeframe, and sender/receiver.

By March, 2007, the decision was made. They decided to install Computhink's ViewWise Enterprise Document Management System with the Email Archive Module. This effectively gave them an Email Archival Solution and interfaced seamlessly with their existing internal Novell GroupWise Email System. The Computhink system allows archival of all e-mail messages that are sent and received by their email users

Additionally, the system can also be used to store and retain all other forms of Electronic Content. The Auburn-Washburn School District now has the flexibility to extend the system's usage later – taking advantage of the full feature set of the ViewWise Document Management Software.

Email Archive Functionality

The initial install only took a day and a half. On April 11, 2007, the Auburn District began archiving. They found the ViewWise Email Archive Module to be smartly designed with functionality that is easy to utilize.

For example, ViewWise supports over 350 file formats in their attachment archival capabilities, and the original format software is not required to view the attachment. Additionally, to save space, if the same attachment is sent to multiple recipients, it is intuitively saved only once.

The process actually begins by installing the ViewWise Enterprise Document Management solution. That's the part of the solution that provides secure and encrypted storage of content, controlled access to archived content, an audit trail for tracking activity in the archive and Version and Revision control for tracking changes made to content.

The ViewWise solution provides multiple retrieval options with search features including full text searching of the email message and attachments, field-based indexing, and by navigating the filing structure (e.g. by date or week number email was archived).

Output options include print, email, fax, export and send to, all based on user security rights. Using the Check-out option, content can be published to a CD or other writeable media. This allows search results to be published out and viewed with the *free* MiniWise Viewer, granting those without the ViewWise application the ability to easily search and review content. Furthermore viewing is made available right in ViewWise without having the authoring application.

Next, installing the ViewWise Email Archive Module provides a flexible configuration, automated processing of content from GroupWise to ViewWise, archiving from multiple GroupWise locations to ViewWise and integrated exception handling process.

Finally, the ViewWise Email Archive Module does not require user intervention – ensuring adherence to any organization's e-mail usage and retention policies, as well as most retention related regulations.

The Process

According to Mitchell, "Making sure the functionality applies to the extremely numerous user base is an ongoing, but painless process." Both Williams and Mitchell agree that Computhink technicians are expert professionals who are inspired to make the process easy for their customers.

Mitchell says they have around 1/4 million emails retained from April 11 through early June, and that's not counting the thousands of emails that get caught in the spam-blocker and are automatically rejected from unnecessary archiving. They have one terabyte of storage space on the server, which should last a long time when compression is factored in. In the first seven weeks, the Auburn-Washburn School District used about ten gigabytes. For additional storage, they have a connection to two terabytes of storage that can be accessed as required.

Says Mitchell, "The process is all automatic. The software archives automatically and does not permit a user to delete an email before it is archived."

Return on Investment (ROI)

Computhink created ViewWise with a built-in ROI advantage by making its acquisition and deployment costs affordable. "Email archiving and retrieval is not an installation where ROI can be found in the conventional sense," says Williams. He continues, "If the time should come when we are responsible for e-discovery, then the cost of this installation will be extremely minimal compared to our potential savings in civil judgments or federal non-compliance fines. People need to know this is a law and must be taken seriously."

Conclusion

"Computhink technicians are willing to work around my schedule," says Mitchell, "That really says a lot about their inspiration and professionalism."

"The bottom-line," says Williams, "is the software has all the necessary features and compatibility we were looking for at a price we could afford. Our ongoing relationship with Computhink couldn't be better and we view email archival and retrieval as a problem solved."