

WEATHERMEN CLOUD IN THE FORECAST



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**CLOUD COMPUTING
EXCHANGE**

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Weathermen – Cloud in the Forecast

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has a fairly large task – to provide anywhere, anytime access to citizens to stay informed on the world’s changing forecast. With such a significant responsibility, providing efficient technology platforms for employees isn’t a luxury, it’s a must.

Stefan Leeb, the Unified Messaging Service Program Manager at NOAA, recognized that the agency’s legacy technology was getting in the way of effectively supporting the mission.

“Our legacy email and calendar systems were archaic,” said Leeb. “They inhibited our ability to disperse information to our workforce – and ultimately to citizens – in a timely manner.”

NOAA’s Cloud Solution

Stirring up the need to improve its email and calendar system, NOAA partnered with Google to implement a reliable and scalable cloud solution. “Google helped us make our transition into the cloud – a critical connection point for our ever-increasing mobile workforce,” said Leeb. “Now, we can connect our system with our mobile devices and provide much-needed collaboration services, such as document and calendar sharing, as well as video chat technology. By switching to the cloud, we save NOAA \$400,000 a year in infrastructure, software, and support costs on supporting mobile devices alone.”

Charting the Path to the Cloud

The project management team aimed for a three phase transition process; however, NOAA extended the process to include six migration phases including: pre-award pilot migration, IT pilot, early adopter, an emergency migration to provide email to a local office whose mail server had crashed, IT support group, and global go live. During the six-month transition the team oversaw the migration of 36 terabytes of data and 150 million emails from the legacy system to the cloud. “The amount of data migrated enabled us to retire 21 mail servers and three calendar servers,” said Leeb.

“The solution team was great in overseeing the project and minimizing issues. Out of the 25,000 accounts affected by the transition to the cloud, less than a quarter of one percent experienced mail migration issues. At the time, NOAA was faced with two natural disasters – an earthquake and a hurricane. Coupling these events with the transition, NOAA was pleased to report that the project was completed and services were delivered on time and within budget.”

NOAA’s Transition – Silver Lining

NOAA noted that it did encounter a few internal challenges when adopting its cloud solution. “Our organizational culture was a hurdle, in that we are a diverse and fragmented organization where each department has disparate processes and tools for

fulfilling mission requirements,” noted Leeb. “It made implementing an enterprise-wide cloud platform difficult.” To address the cultural challenge, NOAA hosted multiple training sessions, provided reference materials, and did not require the abandonment of mail clients for the Google web interface.

Looking forward, NOAA intends to revise its mobile device strategy to be vendor neutral, and will not renew its Blackberry support contract, opening the possibility to use devices such as the iPhone and Android. “An important consideration is pure economics,” said Leeb. “We need to reduce our operating costs, and the cost to license, operate, and manage BlackBerry devices is very high compared to alternatives which support multiple mobile platforms.”

The overall migration project proved to be successful with a relatively smooth transition.

Forecast for Future Cloud Implementations

Reflecting on the planning of the cloud service, Leeb provided helpful advice for agencies considering a similar solution –

“It is important to meet with and learn from those who have already gone through the process and ask lots of questions. Stay focused on your requirements. Negotiate your SLAs and the terms of service with your provider before you award the contract. That contract should also

include incentives and disincentives for the service provider throughout the period of performance.”

Leeb also noted additional recommendations. “First, do not make training optional,” said Leeb. “Only a third of our workforce attended our training programs before using the new services. When employees realize they need a bit more guidance on the best way to use the new services, they are able to go to our online training video library. Establishing training attendance as mandatory upfront would have saved time across the organization.

“Have a dedicated implementation team within your organization,” noted Leeb. “This will help reduce overworking the IT staff while juggling normal business with the cloud implementation. Create policies and guidelines for the new services in order to better manage data, minimize chaos, and guide effective and consistent use of the new tools.”

Lastly, Leeb offered advice on the pilot program for new cloud solutions. “Be sure that the implementation support staff is migrated in the early phases,” he stressed. “This ensures they are familiar with the technology when helping the rest of the organization transition.”

Click [here](#) to see Stefan Leeb’s full presentation from the April Cloud Computing Exchange meeting, as well as photos and a summary of the dialogue.